

Bodo Saori as a Resource for an Integrative Model of Christian
Religious Education in a Postcolonial Perspective: A Subaltern
Approach

By

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Abstract

Among the Bodo families and communities of Assam, India, a centerpiece of socio-economic and cultural life is community work called saori. Saori involves a reciprocal exchange of service that is replete with pedagogical implications. Drawing from the concept and practice of saori, this dissertation attempts to form a catachrestic Christian religious education in an integrative model for the Bodo churches in India, working from postcolonial perspective and a subaltern approach. The aim is to envision, how the various templates of saori, emerging from a particular cultural context, can be potential contributors for Christian religious education in a global context through hospitality, dialogue, humility and justice for dwelling together in solidarity. The dissertation shows that such endeavor has to take place in a dialectical integration of various tensions—i.e., tradition (continuity) and transformation (change), gospel and culture, identity and difference, and local and global. Further, it also proposes that these tensions play out between dominant/cosmopolitan and periphery/vernacular perspectives, especially in pedagogical practices. Examining the above proves important for more fruitfully attending to cultural expressions, experience and histories of a particular community in

the vision of God, learning to dwell together with others in an anticipation of transformation toward global solidarity through the educational ministry of the church.

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Introduction

Religious education attempts to understand and contribute to the processes by which a society [community] touches its deepest and most fundamental resources for meaning as it makes decisions about clarifying and embodying its vision. A task of religious education is to examine and understand cultural processes of engaging the vision of God with the possibilities of human experience.¹

I. Locating the Problem: An Elaborative Description

The *fact* of cultural diversity and heterogeneity in a postcolonial and post modern world, amplified through the critical lenses of “historical consciousness” and “pluralistic consciousness,”² has raised the question of how to understand culture, history, and experience in relation to Christian religious education. The question of culture in relation to Christ, Christianity or, for that matter, Christian religious education is as old as Christianity itself.³ As a result of increased cultural diversity and religious pluralism, the question has gained significant attention in academic fields and has become more complex than ever before, as resurgent tribes and communities—such as the Bodos or Boros (phonetically Bada or Bara)⁴ are conscious of their own history and culture in matters of religious faith and practice. In the last decades across the fields of theology, mission, and religious education, there has been an increased focus on the validity and

¹ Jack L. Seymour and Donald E. Miller, eds., *Theological Approaches to Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 9.

² Thomas E. Reynolds, *The Broken Whole: Philosophical Steps Toward a Theology of Global Solidarity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006). Especially see Chapter Two.

³ Richard Niebuhr in his classic work, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951, 1956), deals extensively the relation between Christ/Christianity and Culture.

⁴ The Bodos or Boros, whom we will discuss in Chapter One, are an ethnic and linguistic minority group in Assam, India. Bodo (a generic name) tribe is one of the earliest settlers in the present northeast India, an autochthon and aboriginal group but now scheduled as Plain Tribes (S.T.) in the Constitution of India. Bodos are the largest tribal group in northeast India. For phonetic sound see Sidney Endle, *The Kacharis*, Introduction by J. D. Anderson, (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1911), 4.

importance of local, particular, and pluralistic cultural and historical analyses and practices, in contrast to the universalism of both Enlightenment reason and the theological liberalism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁵ Christian religious education needs to examine and understand how and in what ways these localized cultural traditions and practices can be productive resources for the teaching and learning activities of the wider Christian community. In particular, the increasing demands of subaltern groups to engage their histories, experiences and subjugated knowledge have made questions of power and epistemology increasingly important.

When it comes to matters of culture in relation to Christian religious education in a postcolonial context, such as in India, the colonial background becomes a defining factor. Missionaries in both their preaching and teaching activities, not only “transplanted” their church but also their cultures.⁶ Questions of *power* (pouvoir) and *knowledge* (savoir), and how the two were mingled in the construction and dissemination of “truths” and “values,” inform an understanding of the “cultural imperialism”⁷ that still manifests itself in the administration, music, dance, rituals, and seasonal festivals of native churches. Historically, Christian religious education in Indian churches in the “mission fields” was ineluctably linked with the hermeneutics, theologies, and episteme

⁵ For theoretical reflection on culture and theology, see Shella Greve Davaney, “Theoretical Reflection on Culture and Theology” in D. Brown, S. G. Davaney, and K. Tanner, eds., *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3-16.

⁶ See Letty M. Russell, “Cultural Hermeneutics: A Postcolonial Look at Mission” in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol.1, no.1 (Spring, 1985), (online) (Baltimore: Scholars Press, 1985) 23-40. See also Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 42.

⁷ On this notion see Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatoo & Windus, 1993).

(arenas of knowledge and its proliferation)⁸ of their “home missions.” Here, by “home mission,” I mean the “sending church” of the mission and by “mission field,” I mean the “receiving end,” the location and context in which the missionaries worked, however formal or informal might be.⁹ So the theologies and Christian religious educational practices of the “home mission,” historically and culturally conditioned by the dominant ideologies of the West, were disseminated in the “mission fields” without much critical reflection by both missionaries and native Christians. The Global North has enormously influenced Christian religious educational programs in the Global South, following the established colonial tradition of sharing wealth, resources, knowledge, and enlightenment.¹⁰ Thus, there is a need to interrogate what Breckenridge and van der Veer call “patterns of domination”¹¹ by the Global North. Such “patterns” extended to the Global South in the parameters of Christian religious education patterns and continued in the form of hegemonic discursive formation even after territorial decolonization, particularly in the arenas of semantics and semiotics, rites and rituals, and observances of cultural and seasonal festivals even those that are not against basic Christian tenets.

Giroux points out that the question of cultural engagement in pedagogy has enabled scholars to interrogate the “dominant cultural traditions” of the West once self-confidently secured “in the modernist discourse of progress, universalism and

⁸ The term “episteme” is drawn from Michel Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge*. For “history,” “idea” and arenas of knowledge and their production and proliferation see Michel Foucault, “Introduction,” *Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 3-19.

⁹ See Russell, “Cultural Hermeneutics,” who differentiates the understanding of mission into two concepts: one, an ecumenical understanding, a Trinitarian concept where mission has divine origin as the mission of God (*missio dei*) and the other that emphasizes on “the receiving end” of church mission that was developed in the 18th and the late 19th centuries along with the planning of colonies but continues in many places till today, not necessarily in territorial sense but in semantics and semiotics. The later concept is meant when I refer to “home mission” and “mission field” in this study.

¹⁰ Leona M. English, “Third Space Practioners: Women Educating for Justice in the Global South” in *Adult Education Quarterly*, Vol.55 No.2, 2005, 85-86.

¹¹ Carol Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, eds., *Orientalism and Postcolonial Predicaments* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1993).

objectivism.”¹² He contends that these dominant cultural traditions were once used “to police and contain subordinate groups, oppositional discourse, and dissenting social movements.”¹³ Giroux observes that the question of cultural engagement in pedagogy leads to the “struggles over the academic canon, the conflict over multiculturalism, and the battle for either extending or containing the rights of new social groups”¹⁴ in academic and educational institutions and elsewhere. This, in turn, reflects a “deeper conflict over the relationship between democracy and culture on the one hand and identity and politics of representation on the other.”¹⁵ It is thus a challenge for Christian religious educators and other cultural workers to address issues involved in redefining the role of culture in education and the relationship between culture and politics. For, as Giroux points out, in such challenges “the political side of culture must be given primacy as an act of resistance and transformation by addressing issues of difference, identity and textuality within rather than outside of the problematic of power, agency and history. The urgent issue here is to link the politics of culture to the practice of a substantive democracy.”¹⁶ As a result, it is crucial to pursue a deepening and extending of the basis for transformative and emancipatory theory and practice in Christian religious education in a postcolonial context. Notwithstanding the powerful repressive effects of state machinery or dominant cultural groups, acts of cultural retrieval aimed at reviving history, cultural symbols, philosophy and ideology once erased and disavowed are commonplace and gaining momentum in today’s world.

¹² Henry A. Giroux, “Living Dangerously: Identity Politics and The New Cultural Racism” in Giroux and McLaren, eds., *Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 29-30.

¹³ Giroux, “Living Dangerously,” 29-30.

¹⁴ Giroux, “Living Dangerously,” 30.

¹⁵ Giroux, “Living Dangerously,” 29-30.

¹⁶ Giroux, “Living Dangerously,” 30.

Take the example of China, a nation with a totalitarian regime that once discarded “four olds,” that is “old customs, old culture, old habits and old ideas” (Confucianism) in the wake of cultural revolution, but is now establishing thousands of Confucian Centers around the globe to promote the philosophy.¹⁷ Such an act of cultural retrieval has become a source of national pride and identity. The totalitarian regime could not erase the engrained old Confucianism from the hearts and minds of people for the simple reason that people do not live by ideology alone, but by tenacious and enduring cultural knowledge and practices that provide meaning and give life significance.

However, on the other hand, as Giroux also notes, the question of culture and its relation to education has “increasingly become interlaced with the issues of power, representation and [the politics of] identity.”¹⁸ The issue here is the temptation to adopt a reverse ethnocentrism, or what Giroux calls “new cultural racism,”¹⁹ in emancipatory practices. Concerned with maintaining cultural “purity” or claiming privileged access to inherited cultural knowledge, such practices result in self-closure and the creation of new borders. Because the very concept of culture is polysemous and contested, questions arise over what kinds of meanings and concepts of culture should be engaged pedagogically within an educational setting. There is nothing wrong with inculturation in education and knowledge, as there is equally nothing to apologize for when engaging with cultural politics, as they have been central to practices of transformation and liberation.²⁰ Questions remain, however, regarding why and how particular meanings of

¹⁷ Carrie Gracie, “The Duke of Zhou: The Man who was Confucius’s Hero,” *BBC News Magazine*, October 9, 2012, accessed October 9, 2012, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-19821144>.

¹⁸ Giroux, “Living Dangerously,” 29.

¹⁹ Giroux, “Living Dangerously,” 36-39.

²⁰ Robert C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 2009 edition, (London: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2001), 8. See also Ali A. Mazrui, *Cultural Forces in World Politics* (London: James Curry, 1990).

culture are or should be employed in education. Complex sets of criteria, both cultural and theological, are necessarily implied. How might Christian religious education in postcolonial context be strategically attentive to localized cultural heritage so as to open up liberative possibilities while avoiding cultural essentialism and reverse ethnocentrism? Exploring this is the purpose of this study.

Christian religious education as theological praxis is always concerned with the fact that learning and knowing should be translated into lived and practical experiences. It is thus not only the history of Christianity, ecclesiology, doctrines, creeds, and meanings that matter, but also the histories/narratives and experiences of marginalized and neglected people in the context of domination and exclusion. In recent years, among the Dalits, tribals and women in India, it has been increasingly recognized that there is a need to develop contextual theologies, hermeneutics, and Christian religious education theory based on the cultural and historical, experiences and narrative, and subjugated knowledges of marginalized groups in the postcolonial, postmodern world.²¹ Since the 1960s, argues Giroux, the question of experience in relation to education has “played a significant role in refiguring a variety of human experiences within a discourse in which diverse political views, sexual orientations, races, ethnicities, and cultural differences are taken up in the struggle to construct counter-narratives and create new critical spaces and social practices.”²²

²¹ Such needs are reflected in the various theological literatures of the Dalits, tribals and women studies in India. For example for women’s voice, see Lalrinawmi Ralte and Evangeline Anderson-Rajkumar, *Feminist Hermeneutics* (Delhi: IWIT/ISPCK, 2002). The Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, Assam has established “Tribal Study Centre” in 1995 within its curriculum to develop methodologies for tribal contextual theologies in order to promote indigenous, contextual tribal theologies and epistemologies. The “Women Study Centre” was established in 1996. See www.etcollege.in/.

²² Giroux, “Living Dangerously,” 31.

However, as Giroux also points out, such pedagogy has a tendency to remain mere resistance rather than to usher in a broader politics of democratic struggle. It has a tendency to confine itself within notions of difference and reified binarism. In the process of enabling members of subaltern groups to reassert their suppressed identities and experiences, such pedagogy may itself become a master narrative, invoking a politics of separation and leading to the suppression of (other) liberatory narratives within the groups.²³ In a field like Christian religious education, we must be aware of these limitations when we emphasize the history/narrative, culture and experience of people. Further, we must remember that our “[experience] is [always an] experience of human finitude,”²⁴ even when it relates to the divine or infinite. Therefore, there is a need to find balance. One means is by investigating how to contextualize subjugated histories, cultures, and experiences in light of the dialectics of present and past, in many cases a contested present and a previously foreign but now retrievable past—so as to foreground both experiences of continuity and sameness as well as change and difference in Christian religious education.

In addition to dialectical tensions between past and present, within the domain of major Christian religious education theories there are dialectical tensions between content/text/discourse and context/culture or gospel/faith and culture. These tensions surface between the schooling-instructional model and the pastoral-community model, and the biblical (divine) revelation education approach and the lived (human) experience

²³ Giroux, “Living Dangerously,” 31.

²⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1975), 357.

education approach.²⁵ Generally speaking scholars have identified five major contemporary approaches or models within the domain of Christian religious education—*Religious Instruction, Faith Community, Spiritual Development, Liberation, and Interpretation*—based on five metaphors: *education, community of faith, person, justice, and meaning*.²⁶ These approaches, concepts, metaphors, and a host of other materials produced in the Western context are widely used in theological schools and churches in India without much critical reflection. Despite their widespread use, however, it is apparent that they do not provide adequate answers to the predicaments of postcoloniality and postmodernity. The glaring fact is that, with the exception of the Liberation model, which has Latin American roots, the rest of the approaches or models of Christian religious education were born out of North American and Canadian contexts that reflect particular interests and values. Although there are a few emerging voices outside the traditional models, there is still great need to develop a model that productively harness the dialectical tensions mentioned above. Such model would be a kaleidoscopic Christian religious education theory for both home mission and mission field churches that account for postcolonial and postmodern sensibilities.

Therefore, my key claim in this study is that to be effective, relevant, transformative, and emancipatory in teaching and learning, Christian religious education in postcolonial and postmodern contexts must be framed in the existential, historical, cultural, and experiential contexts of a given community. Yet this cannot be productive without a dialectical integration of continuity (tradition) and change (contemporaneity),

²⁵ Such dialectical tensions are reflected in the various essays in Seymour and Miller, eds., *Contemporary Approaches to Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982).

²⁶ For these major approaches of Christian education, see Seymour and Miller, eds., *Contemporary Approaches*.

convention and innovation, what postcolonialists call the tension between repetition and rupture, and necessity and freedom,²⁷ among other similar dichotomies in order to move beyond the present to “new horizons” of teaching and learning. In other words, a critical analysis of the roles of history, culture, and experience is essential task for developing a transformative Christian religious education theory for a given community. At the same time, this also must be linked and integrated dialectically with various dimensions of discourse that appear opposed within a culture and its history and experiences, creatively holding together tensions—for example those between tradition and contemporaneity, past and present, content and context, gospel/faith and culture, self and other, local and global, or dominant and periphery. Exploring how such dialectic integration might be envisioned is the task of this study.

II. Orienting Toward a Goal and Tasks Ahead

The concerns expressed above suggest the need for a new model of Christian religious education in a fresh and kaleidoscopic manner for subaltern groups, such as the Bodos. Therefore, my primary goal in this study is to develop an alternative theoretical model of Christian religious education with a postcolonial perspective in a subaltern approach for the Bodo churches in Assam, India. To achieve this goal, first, I will critically examine the historical and experiential processes of the Bodos in the past and the present in the contexts of Sanskritization²⁸ and colonialism as well as in the form of Hindutva

²⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique on Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), see Culture Section.

²⁸ Sanskritization is a religious process of entering into a hierarchical Hindu caste system. The term will be defined in Chapter One. There are four major castes within Hindu socio-religious structure: 1.

ideologies and neocolonialism respectively. I will explore ways of engaging the histories/narrative and experiences of the Bodos in education in general and Christian religious education in particular, as we need to account for the history/narrative and experiences of a given community in setting the goals, contexts, methods and curriculum for Christian religious education. There has to be a meaningful dialogue between the past and present. Such dialogue must proceed with an historical consciousness from a postcolonial perspective. This historical consciousness has helped Bodos retrieve cultural symbols, rites and rituals long obscured and disavowed by the colonialist “civilizing mission” of Western Christian missionaries. However, because subalterns in India are heterogeneous, this study will not consider the Bodo community to be representative of all the Indian subalterns. It will thus focus primarily on those subaltern groups in northeast India.

Second, I will explore and attempt to engage the culture and subjugated knowledge of the subaltern groups, such as Bodos, from the perspective of polysemous and diverse concepts of culture. To this end, I will analyze a community work called “saori,” sometimes termed “chaori” or “sanguri,”²⁹ in order to explore its pedagogical dimensions. Saori has long been at the epicentre of socio-economic and cultural life for the Bodos, and as such it will be fundamental to this study. It will be considered a “root metaphor” from which a Christian religious education model can be derived. At stake here is the fact that there must be meaningful, creative, and critical dialogue between

Brahmin (priestly caste), 2. Kshatriya (ruling caste), 3. Baisya (trade and commerce caste) and, 4. Sudra (menial, working caste) in the order of hierarchy. Bodos and many other tribes in India are outside of this caste system and, therefore, considered “outcaste.” Personal names (historical), places and concepts were also Sanskritized just as it was Anglicized during colonial period.

²⁹ Chandana Bhattacharjee, *Ethnicity and Autonomy Movement: Case of Bodo-Kacharis of Assam* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1996), 37-38. See also Endle, *Kacharis*, 13.

culture and Christian religious education, and between faith and culture in the Bodo context.

Third, I will develop a theoretical framework/perspective in order to analyze the major theories of Christian religious education and in turn suggest an alternative model based on postcolonial hermeneutics and an understanding of culture from a postcolonial perspective. Moving beyond traditional Christian religious education models, I will suggest that new “subject formation/constitution” and “subaltern agency”³⁰ can help foster the retrieval of the silenced past of the subalterns. Moving further, then, following Reynolds, I will argue that within culture—even in its retrieval of the past—lies “new horizons” in a dialectic of sameness and difference, familiarity and contrast, and the “always-already” and “not-yet” playing out in ongoing conversation and dialogue.³¹

Fourth, I will critically investigate how power and knowledge intersected in the Christian religious education of both formerly colonized countries (such as India) and of (present or former) colonial powers. This means looking at both “mission fields” and “home mission” as the triad of theology, hermeneutics, and general education continues to be a vehicle of cultural imperialism. It also means examining the extent to which there has been a continuation of the influence of empire (colonialism) on episteme (the domain of knowledge) among the Bodos. For Western Christian religious education programs made themselves simulacrum to God’s kingdom, a “representation” or “image” of the “ideal” among Bodo churches. Thus power and knowledge intersected in the production and dissemination of text/discourses, the influence of this colonial legacy still lingering.

³⁰ These concepts will be defined and described elaborately in Chapter Three. For Subaltern Subject Constitution, see G. C. Spivak, “The Rani of Sirmur” in Francis Baker et al., eds., *Europe and Its Others* vol. 1 (Colchester: University of Essex, 1985) 130; For Subaltern Agency, see Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 245-282.

³¹ See Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, Chapter Four.

This will become evident by critically analyzing the major theories of Christian religious education in light of the models of contextual theology propounded by Stephen B. Bevans.³²

It would be the height of irony, however, to assume that present Christian religious education programs in the churches of both the “colonizer” and the “colonized” countries are “post”- colonial in the sense of being “beyond” or “outside” colonial influences, thus have nothing to do with past colonialism and imperialism, for this place the matter securely in the past without interrogating ongoing effects on theology, mission and education.³³ Nor would it be helpful for Christian religious education in either formerly colonized or colonizer countries to remain isolated as only an ecclesiastical project, an island that has nothing to do with the outside world, that is other cultures or faiths. Young rightly points out “[the] legacy of colonialism is as much a problem for the West as it is for the scarred lands in the world beyond,”³⁴ be it in pedagogy, theology, politics or economy. In the same way, perpetuation of any residual colonial legacy or entanglement in the theories and practices of Christian religious education is as much a problem for the Western churches as it is for those in the formerly colonized countries. Therefore, there is a need to critically analyze the major theories of Christian religious education in light of interlocking historical, cultural, ideological and theological contexts in which they were developed and are taught in Indian theological colleges and institutions today.

³² Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992).

³³ See Joerg Rieger, “Theology and Mission Between Neocolonialism and Postcolonialism” in *Mission Studies*, 21:2, Koninlijjke, Brill NV, 2004, 202-227.

³⁴ Robert C. Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 126.

Finally, based on pedagogical dimensions derived from the concept and practice of saori, I will develop an integrative model of Christian religious education via community metaphor in subaltern perspective. Engagement with cultural symbols, rites and rituals, such as those surrounding saori for Bodo people in India, have become important to the activity of Christian religious education among subaltern groups due to conscientization through processes of becoming historically conscious. Developing a theoretical model for Christian religious education using the concept and practice of saori has educational advantage in that it offers a way to connect with local cultural practices and histories, which contextualizes Christian formation and resists colonial hegemony. I am calling this an “integrative model,” because it is grounded in the integrative nature of saori and its pedagogical dimensions in a dialectical way to promote a dialogical praxis. Drawing from Reynolds’ concept of “dialectical pluralism,”³⁵ the model strives for a *dialectical integration* of various tensions Christian religious education facing today in pluralistic contexts and the aim is to foster a *dialectical whole*.³⁶ I am defining the model catachrestically and therefore I am also calling it “Catachrestic Christian religious education.” By the use of “catachrestic” I mean an interventionist reading strategy to engage any dominant religious text or discourse.³⁷ The attempt here is not to create merely an “oppositional” or “counter-narrative” to Western approaches, but rather to create a dialogical subject formation/constitution and subaltern agency within Bodo cultural and historical narratives, building from experiences of the past and present to orient toward a possible future.

³⁵ See Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, Chapter Four.

³⁶ The concepts “dialectical integration” or “dialectical whole” will be described in Chapter Five.

³⁷ I will define the term catachresis elaborately in Chapter Five.

I am endeavouring here to formulate a postcolonial Christian religious education theory that stands at the interstices of Sanskritization and colonization, caste and class, and tradition and contemporaneity, situated in the Bodo context. This process is informed by my own social location as both a “subaltern” and a “postcolonial subject”³⁸ standing at the intersection between identities as a Bodo and a Christian, thus being an ethnic, linguistic, and religious minority. Reflecting such hybridity, I interrogate the question of marginality with epistemological categories developed by “expert expatriates” (essentially, I choose Indian-origin expatriates and do not start with the Christian tradition), and analyze issues of cultural oppression, domination, and hegemony from both the East (primarily within India) and the West through biblical hermeneutics, theology, secular education, and Christian religious education. Although born and living in a post-independent India, the Christian religious education inherited from missionaries made me feel like a colonial subject, despite its unequivocal claims to be a liberating force. Thus I am still in the ambiguities of being a postcolonial subject.

III. Methodological Approach of the Study

As a result of its interdisciplinary nature, Christian religious education relies on various other disciplines for its research methodology, such as education theory, anthropology, theology, psychology, and other humanities and social sciences. Despite this extensive borrowing, Christian religious education is still unambiguously a discipline in its own

³⁸ Various postcolonial thinkers use the term “postcolonial subject.” Postcolonial Feminist writers also use the term. See Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louise, MO: Chalice, 2000). Russell further argues the term is used now even by “white feminists” thinkers. See Russell, “Cultural Hermeneutics: A Postcolonial Look at Mission” in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, (online) vol.1, no.1, (Spring) (Baltimore: Scholars Press, 1985), 23-40.

right. Generally, the methodologies used by those working in the discipline to develop theory and practice fall into two broad approaches. Some begin with divine revelation or biblical understanding and tradition (contents/text), which is “from above” and others start with human life experiences (context/culture), which is “from below.”³⁹ This dichotomy defines the field. Those who uphold the view that Christian religious education should start with biblical understanding or divine revelation and tradition emphasize the importance of content/text as determinative of experience or context/culture. In contrast, those who start with lived experiences emphasize the importance of context/culture as the framework for meaningfully receiving content/text or biblical understanding and tradition. Christian religious education oriented around content/text or biblical understanding and tradition tends to accord primacy to revelation as the main source for doing Christian religious education, and thus generally portrays Christian religious education as *given* from *above* and divinely inspired. In contrast, experience or context/culture oriented Christian religious education suggests that it *emerges* from *below*, with human experience as the formative basis.

Because this study takes into consideration the position of subalterneity and marginality of the Bodos with the goal of developing an alternative, transformative, and emancipatory Christian religious education in the context of postcolonialism, I will proceed “from below,”⁴⁰ taking people’s lived experience as paramount for developing an education system. The philosophical and theoretical concepts behind education from

³⁹ Seymour and Miller, eds., *Contemporary Approaches*, 123. See also Mary Elizabeth Moore, who deals with the tension of methodological approaches in her work in “The Dilemma: Tradition and Experience in Christian Religious Education” in *Education for Continuity and Change: A New Model for Christian Religious Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 27-55.

⁴⁰ Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and the numerous works of Postcolonial writers, particularly that of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak are the foundations of education from below concept.

below are largely derived from the works of Freire, particularly, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, along with the works of various other postcolonial critics and cultural workers, particularly Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. Following Tillich, Reynolds also follows this methodology of working "from below" in developing an "incipient theology" for global solidarity.⁴¹ In keeping with this approach, I will start with the particulars of the Bodos, their socio-cultural, historical, and lived context and saori, the entelechy of Bodo pedagogy. In this methodological approach, narrative or narrativization (histories or stories) and the lived experiences of an individual or a community become key components in strategizing and theorizing an educational approach, cultivating deeper learning along with greater understanding and a more meaningful dialogue between cultures/context and gospel/content.

Second, following Bevans, Freire, and Reynolds, I will also use dialectical or dialogical methodology, which acknowledges conflicting factors and creates space for conversation and dialogue.⁴² Dialectical methodology, however, is not used in this study with the intent of upholding the reified binarism of master/slave, self/other, and/or West/East, but rather to create space for openness and dialogue to foster mutuality, reciprocity, coherence, and interchangeability. Therefore, this study's methodological approach aspires to be "both and" rather than "either/or." I will address the most common political critique of Hegelian dialectic that at the end it excuses everything. However, the agenda here is not to excuse everything but to strategize to create an interplay between sameness and difference, compatibility and incommensurability, and familiarity and

⁴¹ Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, 11.

⁴² Bevans, *Models*, 93.

contrast in different power structures, with the goal being to bring dialectical integration/wholeness to Christian religious education.

IV. Conceptual Landscape: Defining Key Terms

It will be helpful at the outset to introduce a few key terms to make clear this study's approach. Important concepts including "saori," "Christian religious education," and "dialectical integration/whole" are defined and described more fully in later chapters. In this section I will address only terms and concepts that appear throughout the study, and are not concerns of specific chapters, but which merit consideration at this point in the analysis to provide some clarity on their use and function. In the postcolonial and postmodern era, where meanings and concepts are contestable and unfixed, the definitions of terms in this study are not meant to be final and universal, but rather descriptive in a way that aids the study's objectives. I agree with Trinh T. Minh-ha that the meaning and definition of a term depends much upon "*who* uses it"⁴³ and what purpose it serves.

A. Subaltern

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines subaltern as "[one] of inferior rank."⁴⁴

Historically, it was Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist, who thematized and popularized the term subaltern in his writings in the 1920s and 1930s. Gramsci used the term to denote the proletariat class, which established the term initially as fundamentally tied to

⁴³ Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Women, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 97.

⁴⁴ Ranajit Guha defines the term subaltern in the "Preface" in *Subaltern Studies I: Writing on South Asian History and Society*, ed., Ranajit Guha (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), vii.

socio-economic concerns, referencing a Western understanding of class.⁴⁵ The term was then adapted for the South Asian context by the *Subaltern Studies Collective* in India, in their series of substantial publications between 1982 and 1996 for which Ranajit Guha served as chief editor. They widened the scope of subaltern to cover “class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way” those who do not come under societies’ elite groups either through class system or caste system. As a result they also argued for “subaltern historiography” to underscore the contributions of subalterns to the Indian freedom movement and the formation of Indian nationalism, contributions that imperial and nationalist historians left out or rather neglected. Spivak’s essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” then delved into the topic of female subalterneity, outlining women, Dalits, and tribals as “subalterns of the subaltern.” In theology and theological education in India, Dalit theologians and pedagogues have taken up the term in their writings to the extent that subaltern and Dalit have become almost synonymous.

However, Sathianathan Clarke, an Indian theologian, in his work *Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religion and Liberation Theology in India*,⁴⁶ echoing Spivak, argues for moving away from a homogenous use of the term subaltern to refer to a group in specific cultural context (e.g. a specific caste or religion), instead approving a flexible use of the term to connote collective groups of marginalized and underprivileged people. Furthermore, he invites to move away from the construction of “negative consciousness,” instead encouraging “active, creative and calculating engagement.”⁴⁷ While I agree with both Spivak and Clarke that a variety of meanings of the term subaltern have to be

⁴⁵ Antonio Gramsci, *Selection from the Prison Notebooks* trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1972), 44- 47.

⁴⁶ Sathianathan Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religion and Liberation Theology in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 7.

⁴⁷ Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity*, 7.

emphasized, I find their use of the term still mainly references caste (socio-religious structure/system) and class (economic status).

In the Indian context, questions of identity and ethnicity in the context of subalterneity have not been properly addressed, either because of the overt political underpinnings or perhaps out of the fear of “reverse ethnocentrism.” Now, the question of caste or even class is not of paramount importance to the people of northeast India, such as the Bodos, who claim themselves as descendents of “Mongolian Stock” due to physical, linguistic, and cultural features that differ them from those of other Indians, who are generally descended either from the “Aryan” or “Dravidian” stocks. For northeast Indian tribes there is no difference between a Dravidian and an Aryan with regards to caste.⁴⁸ Consequently, they make no distinction between a Dalit and a high caste Hindu. The idea of a caste system, or for that matter the Hindu hierarchical structure in general is a non-issue for the northeast Indian tribes as they do not consider themselves as a part of the caste system or engage with it. However, that does not mean that it does not affect their lives. While I generally support a heterogeneous definition of subalterneity that emphasizes the term’s positive and creative features, in the specific context of this study and the Bodo community the term is most applicable as reference to their statuses as a “peasant community” (economic subalterneity) and an ethnic identity whose “history” and “culture”⁴⁹ have been marginalized by the dominant groups. It also has a reference to the formation of subject constitution and subaltern agency for the Bodos in particular and for the northeast Indian tribes in general. The struggle of the

⁴⁸ Bodo, Mishing, Nagas, Mizo, Khasi, Jaintia, Garo, Dimas, Rabha, Kokbor, Kuki etc. are some of the tribes in northeast India. *The Assam Tribune*, a major leading regional newspaper on August 20, 2012 reported that there are 450 tribal groups in northeast India.

⁴⁹ The Bodo historiography will be analyzed within the contours of “peasant community,” “history” and “culture” in Chapter One.

Bodos has been primarily for historical and cultural rights, but it has also encompassed economic parity and equal opportunity. The term subaltern is, therefore, primarily applied to the Bodos as an *ethno-historico-cultural* concept, describing both a people whose history and culture had been suppressed by the dominant groups in the process of Sanskritization and colonization and an economically oppressed class. Thus, the subject of Christian religious education must necessarily be considered in relation to the once disavowed and erased cultural elements—i.e. semantics and semiotics, rites and rituals, ethos and worldview, and observation of festivals—all of which were associated with otherness and an inferior cultural rank as part of cultural imperialism during missionizing endeavours. In those circumstances, practically speaking there was no difference between “Sanskritization” which we will discuss in the first chapter, and “Christianization” which we will discuss in the fourth chapter, as both were conducted with an assimilationist agenda that was homogenizing and totalizing. Therefore, the term subaltern has both pedagogical and political underpinnings.

B. Postcolonial/Postcolonialism/Postcoloniality

There is no single and unified meaning for any of these terms. However, they can be understood in two broad general senses: historically and ideologically. Those who use the term historically normally use it with a hyphen (post-colonial) and they are referring specifically to a relationship with a historical moment, usually the end of European colonial rule in Africa and Asia after the Second World War when most of the colonized countries gained independence. However, those who use the term ideologically, without the hyphen (postcolonial), particularly postcolonial critics and cultural workers, use it to

convey resistance against the perpetuation of hegemonic domination in cultural, ideological, philosophical, educational, political, and economic landscapes by the dominant groups. Young even suggests the term “tricontinentalism” as an alternative to postcolonialism in tune with Anouwar Abdel-Malek and Gerassi, who adopted the term in place of “Third World” in the first conference of the Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, held in 1966 at Havana. The term was coined to avoid homogenization of ‘the South’ and to resist negative connotations ascribed to the non-west.⁵⁰ Postcolonialism then does not simply refer to the period after the physical expulsion of former colonizers from a colonized country. Postcolonialism or postcoloniality are neither Eastern nor Western; rather, as Young has rightly put it, they are, “a dialectical product of interaction between the two, articulating new counterpoints of insurgency from the long running power struggles that predate and post-date colonialism.”⁵¹ In this view the “post” refers to neither “past” nor “after.”⁵² According to Homi K. Bhabha “post” also means “beyond,”⁵³ which gestures towards a meaning of “not yet.” In this study, I want to explore the idea of moving beyond current postcoloniality to a “not yet.” By doing so, I maintain the ideological aspect of the concept.

⁵⁰ Young, *Postcolonialism*, 4-5.

⁵¹ Young, *Postcolonialism*, 68.

⁵² S. R. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 245-247. For an extensive definition, see Catherine Keller, Michael Nauser, and Mayra Rivera, eds., *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* (St. Louise, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2004), 6-7.

⁵³ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 5-6.

C. Colonialism/Imperialism

The terms colonialism and imperialism, while having important differences for historians, are generally used interchangeably by postcolonial critics and thinkers. However, Young defines the terms distinctly from one another. He associates colonialism historically with practice and imperialism conceptually with ideology. For Young, equating ‘colonialism’ and ‘imperialism’ is problematic. He argues that the fact that the term post-colonial is used, rather than post-imperial, suggests that a *de facto* distinction is assumed.⁵⁴ In Young’s estimation, colonialism—or for that matter colonization—is pragmatically linked to the physical occupation of lands and territories, particularly when driven by economic interests. Therefore, it has specific connotations. Alternatively, Young defines imperialism in connection with an expansion and assertion of ideologies emanating from a metropolitan centre, forming a “state policy, driven by grandiose projects of power,”⁵⁵ that has diverse connotations. However, despite ascribing significant importance to these distinctions, Young admits that both colonialism and imperialism involve the subjugation of one people by another.

Along with various postcolonial critics, particularly Spivak,⁵⁶ I maintain that the distinctions in meaning between colonialism and imperialism do not make any difference to the lived experiences of the people who undergo domination and subjugation in any form, be it territorial, socio-economic, political, cultural, ideological, or educational. While in colonization both physical and ideological occupation are real and specific, in imperialism there is a virtual occupation of land/territory with the real assertion or

⁵⁴ Young, *Postcolonialism*, 15.

⁵⁵ Young, *Postcolonialism*, 16-17.

⁵⁶ Spivak, *Critique*, 3.

imposition of diverse ideologies upon the periphery by metropolitan state machinery. The only difference that I can perhaps perceive is on the operational level. In colonialism, the operation of domination and subjugation directly flow from the occupier (colonizer) to the occupied (colonized), while in imperialism there are many layers of systems and structures within the state through which social control is achieved and mediated.

D. Culture

As culture is defined elaborately in the second and third chapters, I will attempt here only to describe in brief the two broad conceptions of culture that inform this study rather than engage in specific definitions. Along with this, I address the issue of power in relation to culture. First, following Geeertz, Taylor, and Tanner culture is understood from anthropological and sociological basis coming out of the structuralist tradition. This understanding of culture looks at semantics, semiotics, and the behaviours of a community or people group as an integrated whole, existing in bounded and stable shapes with systems of beliefs, practices, ideas, feelings, and values. Second, following Bhabha, Spivak, and other postcolonial critics culture is understood through the poststructuralist tradition as a human construction that encompasses social interactions in different power structures, where semantics and semiotics are hybrid, differentiated, unstable, fluid, open, and contested. As such, a culture operates “in a chain of rupture and repetition,” where “every declared rupture is an undeclared repetition”⁵⁷ and consequently “culture alive is always on the run, always changeful.”⁵⁸ A community shapes its culture and a community is shaped by its culture, and such culture always is both stable and unstable,

⁵⁷ Spivak, *Critique*, 333.

⁵⁸ Spivak, *Critique*, 357.

sedimented and innovating, and consensual and conflicted.

My approach, following Tanner, Schreiter, and Reynolds, attempts to hybridize such a dichotomous understanding of culture, viewing culture both as an integrated whole in relative homeostasis, with a sense of being bounded and a shared ethos of belonging, as well as hybridized, contested, differentiated, and unstable, defined by contrast, unfamiliarity of the “other,” and the dialectic of homely and “unhomely.”⁵⁹ I take these two understandings of culture in creative tension and dialogue with one another, with the goal of moving beyond their limits.

Despite many facets of operation of power in culture, following Comaroff and Comaroff, in this study I see power operating in culture in two broad modes, agentic and nonagentic⁶⁰ within the realm of Christian religious education in the Bodo context. In the agentic mode power is generated in culture/community through hegemony and ideology with direct “human agency,” as was the case during “civilizing mission” of the colonial and heightened missionary eras. In the agentic mode human agency is paramount, the operation of power takes place in a specific historical context and is carried out through the production, circulation, and consumption of signs and objects that shape actions and the perceptions of others. In nonagentic mode, however, power in culture/community is generated without human agency into everyday life through transcendental and suprahistorical forces, such as gods or ancestors, religious and scientific knowledge, and biological instinct or probability. As products of ideological constructions, these sources are generally deemed “natural” (through scientific knowledge) or “ineffable,” (through religious knowledge and education) and free from human agency. This type of power,

⁵⁹ Bhabha, *Location*, 13.

⁶⁰ Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, Volume 1 (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 22.

especially in the postcolonial and postmodern world, can be more subtle and coercive. In this mode power thus proliferates from outside the realm of institutional politics, where it might not even be recognized as power, and because of this its operation may be as effective as the most violent coercion in shaping, controlling, directing, and dominating thoughts and actions.⁶¹ For Christian religious education in the Indian and Bodo contexts (postcolonial and postmodern contexts), power seems to operate on cultures generally more in nonagentic mode, that is via alleged transcendental and supra-historical religious doctrines and text/discourses that regulate social control, faith and conduct by means of semantics and semiotics, rites and rituals, and ethos and worldviews.

E. Palimpsest history

In this study in the first chapter, the notion of palimpsest history has been applied in the discussion of a brief Bodo historiography. In the act of investigating history postcolonial theorists suggest, looking at colonial histories palimpsestically. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a palimpsest is “a parchment or other writing surface on which the original text has been effaced or partially erased, and then overwritten by another.”⁶² In postcolonial theory the concept of palimpsest history means that the histories/stories of the colonized have been effaced or partially erased by the colonizers and they were overwritten. However, despite defacement or overwriting, the sedimentation of previous text remains. For Indian subalterns the term references effacement or erasure and overwriting not only from colonizers but also from dominant native groups. Therefore, there is a layering of history due to writing, erasing and overwriting of histories of

⁶¹ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation*, 22.

⁶² R. S. Coloma, “Palimpsest History and Catachrestic Intervention” in Coloma, ed., *Postcolonial Challenges in Education* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2009), 3-22.

colonized/dominated and their cultures.⁶³

V. Shape of things to come: A Structural Outline

In any research-based writing, the general expectation is to see a linear progression of ideas, with one thought leading to the next and each chapter building on its predecessors. While, I have generally followed this approach, I have also made room for interplay between the chapters, allowing them to refer back and forth to one another when it is natural. As a result, some prominent themes may continually resonate throughout.

Chapter One analyzes both the historical and present-day socio-political and economic contexts of the Bodos, which serve as the basis of the study. Bodo history is analyzed palimpsestically and briefly from the perspective of subaltern and postmodern historiographies, who underwent both Sanskritization and colonization. Next, their present socio-political and economic conditions are investigated from the perspective of subaltern historiography, where Bodos are located under the subjugation of neocolonialism and Hindutva. At the end of the chapter I explore the significance of subaltern history/narrative in epistemology, something once disavowed by scientific and objective historicism. This history contests the genealogies of “origin” and “supremacy” found in the dominant narrative/history.

After establishing this context/background, Chapter Two addresses Bodo saori, as an epicentre of socio-economic and cultural life for the Bodos. Employing a Geertzian concept of culture this chapter explores saori in the context of culture as an integrating practice of community life with twin purposes: to understand the theoretical implications of culture in relation to education, laying the groundwork for material development in

⁶³ Coloma, “Palimpsest History,” 4-5.

Chapter Three; and to derive pedagogical concepts that can be used in developing a Christian religious education model in the fifth and sixth chapters.

Chapter Three stands as a bridge between the early and later sections of this study. Its main topics—postcolonial theory, hermeneutics and culture—are discussed in order to establish a solid theoretical framework for later chapters as well as to introduce postcolonial perspective for Christian religious education. Culture is discussed in the postcolonial and postmodern terms based on the poststructuralist tradition, considered as open, contested, and unstable, operating in asymmetrical power structures. This chapter also serves to connect some of the theoretical implications found in previous chapters (specifically, history/narrative in relation to epistemology in Chapter One and culture in relation to education in Chapter Two) and provides a theoretical perspective from which the major Christian religious education theories/approaches in Chapter Four can be analyzed. Finally, the discussion lays out grounds for the development of an Integrative Model of Christian religious education in the fifth and sixth chapters.

The analysis of major approaches/theories in Christian religious education in Chapter Four centres on Jack L. Seymour and Donald E. Miller's *Contemporary Approaches to Christian Education*. My choice to use these approaches is based on the fact that they are learned and taught in Indian theological schools. The different approaches are analyzed in light of contextual theologies suggested by Stephen B. Bevans in his work, *Models of Contextual Theology*.⁶⁴ These models are helpful as tools for analyzing how culture is interlinked with theology, as Bevans, like the postcolonialists, uses context and culture almost synonymously, and as a basis of

⁶⁴ For different models of contextual theologies, see Bevans *Models of Contextual Theology*, 1992.

exploring the interface or conversation between contextual theologies and Christian religious education. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to locate the educational ministry of the Bodo churches in the historical context of colonialism, mission and theology and the existing traditional approach of Christian religious education in the Bodo context. Chapter Four shows how major theories of Christian religious education are conditioned by the historical, cultural, theological, and ideological categories of the West.

In the fifth chapter, based on the pedagogical dimensions of saori I attempt to propose a model of Christian religious education in postcolonial perspective, a subaltern approach which I call an “Integrative Model.” Since the model is defined catachrestically in postcolonial perspective, it is also called “Catachrestic Christian religious education” or “Catachrestic Catechesis.” It could also be called a dialectical or dialogical model, after Bevans and Reynolds, or a saorian model, as it uses the pedagogical dimensions of saori. The proposal seeks to support the dialectical integration of continuity (tradition) and change (contemporaneity), convention and innovation, and repetition and rupture in relation to the history, culture, and experiences of the Bodos.

In Chapter Six, I will offer a few practical suggestions for community practices that supports dwelling together in global solidarity in both metaphorical and practical senses, with an emphasis on hospitality, dialogue, humility, and justice. I advance the themes of solidarity and reciprocity, dialogue, humility and justice derived from saori and the Bodo concept of hospitality to foster global solidarity of learning.

Finally, in Conclusion I will offer a summary review of the main points of the dissertation and an exploration of its implications for the Bodo churches in Assam. Then I will conclude my dissertation with a summary statement.

The aim of this study is primarily theoretical rather than empirical, and is thus focused almost entirely on adult education. As such, my proposal of Christian religious education theory based on the analysis of saori suggests a conceptual and general theoretical framework and it is heuristic in nature. Therefore, although the conclusion highlights its implications for the Bodo churches but challenges in planning and execution that will require further investigation and research to address the concerns raised in this study. I hope this study can function as a wedge to open a new angle of vision on Christian religious education theory and practices beyond postcoloniality.

Chapter One

Bodo Context and the Significance of History/Narrative in Epistemology

The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with ‘newness’ that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The ‘past-present’ becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living.⁶⁵

Introduction

Tumaloke Kachari bhashat kotha nokoba, “You don’t talk in Kachari (Bodo or Boro).”⁶⁶

This harsh and thundering order not to talk in Kachari (Bodo) was unleashed upon us one day by Lakhi Das, a Hindi Teacher, while I was studying in Middle English School at Paschim Patala in 1968-70, situated in Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), Assam, at the foothills of Bhutan. As a young boy this was when I came to know that we the Bodos are also known as Kacharis. While the name of the School was “Paschim Patala Middle English School,” a name that carried the tag of British colonial legacy, the language of instruction for the ninety-nine percent Kachari (Bodo) students was, for the sake of assimilation and national integration, Assamese, a typical postcolonial predicament in independent India. In 1975-77, I was reminded of this experience through a student named Jatin Kachari who did undergraduate studies with me at Darrang College in Tezpur, Assam. Even at the undergraduate level there was a “Roll Call” system, a Victorian practice still commonly used in schools of Assam to ascertain the “presence” or

⁶⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 10.

⁶⁶ Tumalok in Assamese means ‘you’ in plural. In both Assamese and Bengali communities the “Das” surname is considered a low caste.

“absence” of the pupils. “Jatin Kachari” came the call. “Present, Madam,” came the response. “Jatin Kachari? *Ki tumi tumar upadhi dhakibo nuarila?*” (What, you could not cover your surname?), the beloved biology professor Minoti Mech⁶⁷ asked Jatin, with a sort of amazement and at the same time with a demanding look.

The surname “Kachari,”⁶⁸ a signifier of “low caste” or rather “out caste” in the scheme of Hindu hierarchical society on the one hand and of cultural difference on the other, should have been removed or at least “covered” through the process of Sanskritization or Hinduization or Assamization. Srinivas defines Sanskritization as “the process by which a *low* caste or tribe or other group takes over the custom, rituals, belief, ideology and style of life of a high, in particular, a twice born (*dvija*) caste”⁶⁹—that is Brahmin. The implication of such a question—“What, you could not cover your surname?”—is that one should be willing to change his or her surname as a part of the process of assimilation and integration into mainstream Hindu hierarchical society.

The above two stories, which are not isolated incidents in Assam, demonstrate the way in which the Bodos were treated as an ethnic and linguistic minority, along with all those who do not come under the purview of Hindu hierarchical caste system. In the name of national integration and assimilation there was a deliberate attempt either to incorporate the Bodos into this caste system or to simply subordinate them through cultural domination. Such hegemonic acts were carried out largely in two

⁶⁷ Minoti Mech was a Biology Professor at Darrang College, Tezpur, where I studied. Historically, Mech is also a part of the greater Bodo race.

⁶⁸ In the process of Sanskritization “Kachari” has become a pejorative term and, therefore, Hinduized Bodos often changed their family names to promote themselves as a part of upward social mobility.

⁶⁹ V. K. R. V. Rao, “Some Thoughts on Social Change in India” in M.N. Srinivas et al., eds., *Dimensions of Social Change in India* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1977), 21-33. M. N. Srinivas coined this definition, which connotes a positive note suggesting as if Sanskritization is a natural phenomenon, thus negating rather than being the result of the coercion and manipulation by the dominant religious groups.

ways—linguistic maneuver (the first story above) and Sanskritization (second story). Use of the Kachari (Bodo) language, a denominator of cultural difference must be discouraged or even stopped completely. In the second story the question came from none other than a University Professor, someone who held position and status in that society. Her authority carried the weight of normative culture and identity. The question posed implies that Kachari surnames that signify Bodo cultural difference should be either replaced or covered with different names that are acceptable and presentable within the hierarchical Indian society. Thus the postcolonial notion of culture, “the-same-yet-not-the-same, different-but-not different,”⁷⁰ is still very much in play within the hierarchical Indian society. Indian cultural history has as one of its prominent threads a conflict between issues of *difference* and *sameness*. This exemplifies how the expression of the concept of community may lead to the tendency of homogenization, overlooking differences among various ethnic groups, or even within them.

My argument in this chapter is that to make Christian religious education effective, relevant, transformative and emancipatory for a given community, a good understanding with a kaleidoscopic view of the historical context and the present-day socio-political and economic experiences of a community is required. In order to have a kaleidoscopic view of the Bodo context, their historical and the present-day socio-political and economic experiences have to be analyzed from the perspectives of subaltern and postmodern historiographies in the contexts of colonialism and Sanskritization as well as neocolonialism and Hindutva. It is imperative to define the role

⁷⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique on Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 340.

of subaltern history or story in Bodo epistemology and historical consciousness. For the present context of a community is always intertwined with the past and future, memory providing orientation to the past and vision offering orientation toward the future. In both theological and Christian pedagogical discourses, the question of historical and present contexts has become increasingly important, particularly as liberation theologies have addressed memories of suffering and visions of future emancipation. Of late, Christian religious education theorists have begun to give context as well as content equal importance, as serious attempts are now being made to analyze the cultural and socio-political situations in which Christian religious education is occurring. Yet many Christian religious education theorists focus on context in ways that do not extend beyond the ecclesiastical boundaries or Western cultural contexts. Melanie May has rightly pointed out that if we are serious enough about changing Christian religious educational programs, simply adding another course to university curricula, while allowing them to remain predominantly Western in perspective and posture, will not suffice. Enacting meaningful change will require a comprehensive analysis of educational settings and styles that highlight differences and multiplicity rather than hiding behind ecclesiastical identity and definition.⁷¹

In this chapter I will analyze the Bodo context with brief historical sketches of the past and the present socio-economic-political situations, based on the theory of Subaltern historiography propounded by the *Subaltern Study* groups in India and in conjunction with George G. Iggers' understanding of postmodern historiography.⁷² At the end, I will

⁷¹ Melanie A. May, "Tradition and Sacramental Education" in Jack L. Seymour, and Donald E. Miller, eds., *Theological Approaches to Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 27-42.

⁷² George G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Hanover, N.H. & London: Wesleyan University Press, 1997).

discuss the significance of narrative/history in epistemology, in the way a group's understanding of themselves and the world is framed. The *Subaltern Study* groups in India, who consider tribals, Dalits, and women to be subaltern of the subalterns is making inroads in studying the histories of these groups in a postcolonial setting.⁷³ However, some may not consider this a “cognitive” and academic exercise, but instead a “moral and political” agenda.⁷⁴ When we develop an approach to Christian religious education for the Bodos, it is paramount that we acknowledge their historical context for two primary reasons: first, the colonial entanglement in both politics and Christian religious education, and second, the present Bodo movement for political and socio-economic self-assertion, a movement based on the way their history has shaped their self-perception. My approach to epistemology and pedagogy for the Bodos will, therefore, take into account these contextual elements.

Undoubtedly, any historical study conducted in a postcolonial setting with a postmodern approach may be “open to the charge of nativism, nationalism—or worse, the sin of sins, nostalgia.”⁷⁵ However, the reality is that “[the] ‘past-present’ becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living,” because an act of remembering in a pedagogical setting “[does] not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent, it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present.”⁷⁶ One of the key tasks of adult educators is “[making] difficulties everywhere [. . .] to surface the complexities within

⁷³ Vinayak Chaturvedi, “Introduction” in V. Chaturvedi, ed., *Mapping Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial* (New York: Orbis Books, 2000), vii-viii.

⁷⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 248. See also Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).

⁷⁵ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing*, 27.

⁷⁶ Bhabha, *Location*, 10.

communities of practice, among practitioners, and in the global sphere.”⁷⁷

I. A Perspective of Bodo history in Subaltern historiography

The Bodo community—a linguistic, religious and ethnic minority, a peasant community with a 90%⁷⁸ of its population still dependent on agriculture—is logically understood as a subaltern group; therefore, I argue that it is reasonable to approach their history from the perspective of subaltern historiography.⁷⁹ The study of modern Indian history, according to Dipesh Chakrabarty, can be grouped into two trends. One trend, which he calls the Cambridge School of historiography, developed in the 1960s, perpetuates an attitude of imperial tradition and cherishes colonialism as a dawn of civilization and modernity, considering colonialism an agent that brought “to the subcontinent political unity, modern education institutions, modern industries, a sense of nationalism, the rule of law and so on.”⁸⁰ The other trend is what he calls nationalist historiography, developed in the 1970s and reflected primarily in the works of Bipan Chandra with the viewpoint that “colonialism was a repressive force that distorted all development in India’s society and polity. The social, political, and economic ills of post-Independence India—including those of mass poverty and religious and caste conflict—could be blamed on the political economy of colonialism.”⁸¹

⁷⁷ Leona M. English, “Third-Space Practitioners: Women Educating for Justice in the Global South” in *Adult Education Quarterly*, vol. 55 No.2, February 2005, 85.

⁷⁸ Prodeep K. Daimari, *The Pilgrimage to Bodoland* (Udalguri: The National Voice Publication, 2002), 8.

⁷⁹ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 8.

⁸⁰ Chakrabarty, *Habitations*, 5-6.

⁸¹ For more information in this connection, see Bipan Chandra, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India: Economic Policies of Indian National Leadership, 1880-1905* (Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1969); Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968); A. R. Desai, *Social*

However, the *Subaltern Studies* group argues that both the Cambridge and nationalist historiographies are elitist in their approaches and that they “wrote up the history of [Indian] nationalism as the story of an achievement by elite classes, whether Indian or British.”⁸² These elitist historiographies do not reflect the stories and experiences of subaltern groups, the struggles and aspirations they experienced in the formation of Indian nationalism; rather, they tend to provide a picture of homogeneity. In the political realm, the *Subaltern Studies* group discovered that there was a strong reactionary side to the elitist nationalist Indian National Congress leaders who emerged from the popular mass movement led by M. K. Gandhi in the 1920s and 1930s, a movement that primarily mobilized the poor, peasants, tribals, and working classes. The elitist approach of nationalist historiography could not enlist “the contributions made by people *on their own*, that is, *independent of the elite* to the making and development of [Indian] nationalism.”⁸³ The *Subaltern Studies* group, therefore, attempted to develop a historiography based in an anti-elitist perspective, called “subaltern historiography,” which has much in common with the “history-from-below” approaches pioneered by English historiographers such as Christopher Hill, E. P. Thomson, and E. J. Hobsbawm. Both subaltern historiography and the “history-from-below” approach start from Marxist inspirations, with a specific intellectual debt owed to the Italian communist Antonio Gramsci, and they try to move away from deterministic, Stalinist readings of Marx.⁸⁴ The primary aim of subaltern historiography is to allow for critical historical analyses in

Background of Indian Nationalism (Bombay: Popular Book Depot, 1959); D.A. Low, ed., *Soundings of Modern South Asian History* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1968); B. S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁸² Chakrabarty, *Provincializing*, 7.

⁸³ Chakrabarty, *Habitations*, 7.

⁸⁴ Chakrabarty, *Habitations*, 7.

which subaltern groups are viewed as the subjects of their history and subsequently as masters of their own destiny.⁸⁵ This is what I am going to explore in the coming sections.

Subaltern historiography can be differentiated broadly in three ways from the “history-from-below” approach of Hobsbawm and Thomson’s English Marxist historiography. First, unlike the notion of “history-from-below,” in its approach subaltern historiography necessarily entails a “relative separation of the history of power from any universalist histories of capital.”⁸⁶ Although subaltern historiography maintains a “relative separation” of history of power (politics) and histories of capital (economy) postcolonial thinkers, using the categories of subaltern historiography, do not maintain that position. Particularly, Spivak perceives that the growth of capital or economic power is interlinked with history of power and politics.⁸⁷ Second, it is critical, especially in the Indian context, of the way that the formation of nations has often been viewed as an achievement of the elite in those nations. Third, in line with the poststructuralist tradition and in the context of postcolonialism, subaltern historiography interrogates the relation between power and knowledge, especially in the domain of epistemology during colonial period.⁸⁸

In conjunction with subaltern historiography, I also look at Bodo history from the perspective of postmodern historiography. Because, there is a common ground between subaltern and postmodern historiographies that lies on the emphasis of the importance of “micro history” or “stories” of common people and the valorization of fragmentation.

Iggers, in his work, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity*

⁸⁵ Chakrabarty, *Habitations*, 7.

⁸⁶ Chakrabarty, *Habitations*, 8. This can be seen as a “pure” position of the subaltern historiography

⁸⁷ For this position, see Spivak, *Critique*, 372-373; see also Robert C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2001), 46-56.

⁸⁸ Spivak, *Critique*, 8.

to the Postmodern Challenge, traces the development of history, from political history to social science oriented history to Marxist historiography and finally to new cultural history. He points out that there has been a paradigm shift in historiography since 1979, under the influence of Lawrence Stone's essay *The Revival of Narratives: Reflections on a New Old History*, in which Stone notes that in the 1970s a basic transformation took place in the way history was viewed and written. According to Stone, the belief that "a coherent scientific explanation of change in the past" is possible, a central tenet of social science oriented history was widely rejected by new cultural historians.⁸⁹ In Iggers' discussion of the development of postmodern historiography, we can observe several points that are important for this study.

First, Iggers argues that the new cultural historians place emphasis on history as a narrative, in which the concrete experiences and actions of human beings are taken into account. This approach to history addresses the culture of a group, and even the will of an individual, as potential causal agents of change. According to Iggers, both social science oriented history and the Marxists' historical materialism have failed to take into account the existential aspects of everyday life. Both start with macro-historical and macro-societal frameworks, in which the state, the market, or, for Marxism, class are central concepts. Both approaches operate under a firm belief in the possibility and desirability of scientifically steered growth. Both social orthodox Marxism and social science oriented historiography leave little room for those segments of population who have been neglected but are eager to claim an identity and history of their own.⁹⁰

Second, Iggers notes that the new cultural history maintains a paradoxical

⁸⁹ Iggers, *Historiography*, 97.

⁹⁰ Iggers, *Historiography*, 98.

relationship with Marxist views regarding the emancipatory functions of history, agreeing with the broad ideas but differing with regards to the constraints from which men and women are to be emancipated. While Marxist historiography views the sources of exploitation and domination as institutionalized structures such as politics or economy, new cultural history is concerned with a web of interpersonal relationships in which it perceives individuals exerting power over one another. In this new conception of history gender assumes a new and significant role.⁹¹

Third, Iggers argues that “social science oriented history had presupposed a positive relationship to a modern, expanding industrial world in which science and technology contributed to growth and development. But this faith in progress and in the civilization of the modern world has undergone a serious test since the 1960s.”⁹² A key objection to the social science conception of world historical processes characterized by modernization was the human cost. This process brought with it immense productive forces, but it also unleashed devastating destructive energies, the brunt of which was taken by “little people,” who had been neglected by the views of the social science history and the conventional political understanding of history, with their focus on the rich and influential.⁹³

Fourth, in the new cultural history, the focus of history has moved from the centre to the margins, to “micro-history” dealing with the common people, who are overwhelmingly disadvantaged and exploited. In this conception, history is considered no longer “a unified process, a grand narrative in which many individuals are submerged, but as a multifaceted flow with many individuals at center. Not history but histories or

⁹¹ Iggers, *Historiography*, 99.

⁹² Iggers, *Historiography*, 99-100.

⁹³ Iggers, *Historiography*, 102.

better stories are what matter now.”⁹⁴ In new cultural history the focus has shifted to peoples’ or groups’ cultures and to existential life experiences of individuals. It is a form of “new historicism.”⁹⁵ The past political history of the “margins” or “subalterns” is reconceived as being an essential contributor to the “narrative” of their present day life as opposed to simply being dismissed as the “romantic traditions”⁹⁶ of popular figures of communities.

Finally, Iggers points out that history “continues to be a powerful means by which groups and persons define their identity. In place of one meaningful process there is now a pluralism of narratives touching on the existential life experiences of many different groups.”⁹⁷ The terms, *histoire*, in French, and *historia*, in Spanish, are suggestive of both history and story. In a sense, history is a “storying” in addition to being the arrangement and interpretation of “facts.”⁹⁸ However, the construction of a particular history or story may differ between dominant and subjugated groups. In India there are scores of mythico-historical examples of contrasting storying between the Aryans and the subaltern groups, such as the tribals and the Dalits.⁹⁹

Despite the differences among the approaches of subaltern historiography, the English history-from-below and new cultural history, certain similarities can be observed. First, all three approaches emphasize a shift from the center to the margins and from macro-history to micro-history to historiography in postmodern and postcolonial settings.

⁹⁴ Iggers, *Historiography*, 103.

⁹⁵ Thomas E. Reynolds, *The Broken Whole: Philosophical Steps Toward A Theology of Global Solidarity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 51.

⁹⁶ Iggers, *Historiography*, 102-103.

⁹⁷ Iggers, *Historiography*, 143.

⁹⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Bonding in Difference” Interview with Alfred Arteaga in Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, eds., *The Spivak Reader* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 15-28.

⁹⁹ For the examples of such storying among Aryans and non-Aryans in India, see G. P. Singh, *The Kiratas in Ancient India* (New Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 1990).

Second, all three approaches foreground the little people (downtrodden, powerless), the neglected, the disadvantaged and the marginalized groups (in Indian context, the Dalits, tribals, and women), left out by so-called objective political historicism, social science-oriented and Marxist historiographies. Third, they provide new opportunities for the academicians and subalterns to reinvent and rediscover identities, cultures, and values of those who live in the periphery of society. Fourth, an emphasis on fragmentation, particularly by the postmodern and subaltern historiographies provides subaltern academicians diverse and varied angles from which history can be viewed afresh. Consequently, in the pedagogical arena they provide scope to develop diverse epistemological categories for theory and practice, which in turn helps the mainstream academia. In this section, I have discussed the perspective of Bodo historiography. In what follows, I will discuss a brief history of the Bodos palimpsestically in order to locate the background/context of the Bodos, the representatives of my study.

II. A brief history of the Bodos in Palimpsests

The Bodos of Assam, India, are one of the aboriginal people groups in northeast India. Linguistically, they are a Tibeto-Burman speaking group. In British India, there were two broad anthropological arguments regarding what should be done with the tribes of India with the mainstream Indian society: one was isolationist, the other assimilationist. The British regime chose to follow the former, defining tribals as distinct groups within Indian society.¹⁰⁰ The same policy was adopted for the Bodos, and hence they are

¹⁰⁰ K. L. Kothari, *Tribal Social Change in India* (Delhi: Himanshu Publication, 1985), 4-5.

categorized as a “Schedule Tribe” under the independent Indian constitution.¹⁰¹ The Bodos represent the largest tribal group in the northeast India and “the tribal population constitutes about 7% of the total population of India.”¹⁰²

A. Bodos with Different Names in Different Eras

One of the tasks of postcolonialism is the deconstruction of historiography palimpsestically.¹⁰³ In this process the relationship between text and power is foregrounded in historical studies of subaltern groups. The Bodos did not leave behind their own documents in a written form, a characteristic common to peasant societies.¹⁰⁴ However, they are portrayed with different names as an “other” in the fringes and margins of various Indian classical literatures. The act of othering was thus not an exclusive privilege of the European colonizers. It existed in ancient India, even in what is called the prehistoric period, though, it reached its zenith making during the European colonial period. Vedic, Epic, Puranic, and Tantric literatures serve as valuable sources of information, with ample examples of appellations for Bodos and various other cognate tribes. In many cases these references have proven to be sources of immense importance and provenance for understanding the histories of the Bodos and other Indian tribes.

B. Kiratas and Mlecchas of Early Hindu Scriptures

Historians, Ethnologists, and Indologists identify the Kiratas of Vedic, Epic, Puranic, and

¹⁰¹ The Indian Constitution generally categorizes its people in three broad categories as General Caste, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe. However, each category has numerous sub-categories. Therefore, the Indian tribes cannot be categorized as a homogeneous group.

¹⁰² Kothari, *Tribal*, 1.

¹⁰³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography” in Guha and Spivak, eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press 1988), 3-32.

¹⁰⁴ Chakrabarty, *Habitations*, 15.

Tantric literatures with the Bodos and other tribes of northeast India.¹⁰⁵ In these classical literatures, in which modern Indian intellectuals and religious groups take pride, Kiratas were portrayed as an othered group. The Vedic literature is considered to be the earliest literature in India, believed to be compiled between 4,500-1,000 B.C., with the Yajurveda understood as the earliest of the four Vedas.¹⁰⁶ The earliest recorded mention of Kirata found in the Yajurveda is in connection with the Purusa-medha, or “human offering” sacrifice, where a list of all kinds of human beings and animals are symbolically or figuratively offered to the gods. In the Yajurveda, Kiratas are mentioned as cave dwellers (*guhabyah Kiratam*). Another reference to Kiratas is found in the Atharvaveda, in which a Kirata girl (Kairatika) is described digging for an herbal remedy on the ridges of the mountains.¹⁰⁷ As descendants of the Kiratas, to this day, Bodos are known for herbal medicines.

The Mahabharata, one of the ancient epics, frequently mentions the powerful king of the *Mlecchas* [the Bodos], Bhagadatta of Pragjyotisa [Assam], who fought in the *Kurukshetra* war on the side of the *Kaurava* against the *Pandavas* along with the *Kirata* and *Cina* [Chinese] armies.¹⁰⁸ Bhagadatta was a non-Hindu, non-Aryan king, and his capital was situated at the present site of Guwahati. The Mahabharata mentions the golden [yellow] colour of the *Kiratas* and *Cina* armies. The Ramayana, the other epic, also mentions “[the] Kiratas, with hair done in pointed top-knots, pleasant to look upon,

¹⁰⁵ On the question of Bodos (Boro or Bodo-Kachari) being descendants of Kiratas of Ancient India mentioned in the early Indian classical literatures, see E. A. Gait, *A History of Assam* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1906); S. K. Chatterji, *Kirata-Jana-Krti = The Indo-Mongoloids, their contribution to the history and culture of India* (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1974); G. P. Singh, *Kiratas in Ancient India* (New Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 1990). There are several other sources on this theory.

¹⁰⁶ Singh, *Kiratas*, 19.

¹⁰⁷ Chatterji, *Kirata -Jana*, 27.

¹⁰⁸ E. A. Gait, *A History of Assam* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1906), 13-14, see also Chatterji, *Kirata-Jana*, 32.

shining like gold, able to move under water, terrible, veritable tiger-men, so are they famed.”¹⁰⁹

According to the traditional explanation, which takes the term as pejorative, the term *Kirata* comes from *Kiranti*, which in turn is derived from *kira* and *atanti*. In Sanskrit, *kira* or *kila* means “those who move about talking gibberish” and *atanti* means “those who move along the mountain sides or in bad, dirty places.”¹¹⁰ The word *Kirata* is also possibly derived from *Cirata* or *cireta* or *cirayita*, also known as *Kirata-tikta* or *Anarya-tikta*, a very bitter plant used by non-Aryans for medicinal purposes.¹¹¹ However, S. K. Chatterji argues that the name is derived from the *Kirantis*, a Tibeto-Burman people living in East Nepal. This is considered the most plausible of the theories, suggesting that the term is a Sanskritization of a Sino-Tibetan tribal name.¹¹² According to G.P. Singh, the term *Kirata* is a generic one and was used for the pre-historic period to refer to both the autochthones and the degraded Aryans who failed to follow Brahmanical laws.¹¹³ According to Singh, the Bodos are one of the autochthones in India.¹¹⁴

C. The Bodo kingdoms

Historians and ethnologists agree that, between the mythological period and the twentieth century CE, the Bodos built various kingdoms with different names. In the Epic, Puranas and Tantra periods Assam was known as *Kamrupa* and its capital was known as *Pragjyotishpur*. The name *pragjyotisa* comes from two words: “prag” and “jyotisa,”

¹⁰⁹ Chatterji, *Kirata- Jana*, 32-33.

¹¹⁰ Chatterji, *Kirata- Jana*, 28.

¹¹¹ Singh, *Kiratas*, 96.

¹¹² Singh, *Kiratas*, 28.

¹¹³ Singh, *Kiratas*, 167.

¹¹⁴ Singh, *Kiratas*, 144.

where prag means former or eastern and jyotisa means a star, astrology or simply shining in Sanskrit. Pragjyotisa, therefore, means the city of Eastern astrology. It is believed that the Tantric form of Hinduism originated in Assam, as the country was known for its magic and incantation.¹¹⁵ Bodos were known for this tradition. Throughout Indian history, Bodos established different kingdoms under different dynastic periods with different names, such as the Asura Dynasty, the Kirata Dynasty, the Varman Dynasty (from 350 CE onwards),¹¹⁶ the Salastambha Dynasty (650 –800 CE),¹¹⁷ the Pralamba Dynasty (900–1000 CE), the Pala Dynasty (from 1000 CE onwards),¹¹⁸ and the Kachari Dynasty.

D. The Kachari Dynasty

The Kachari Dynasty deserves a special mention. Following the invasion of Ahoms in the year 1228 CE, Assam history underwent a noteworthy change. The Ahoms, led by Sukapha, from a Shan tribe from Thailand who had a recorded history, invaded Assam in 1228 CE.¹¹⁹ From this point onward the Bodos were known as the Kacharis. E. A. Gait comments that, the “Kacharis may perhaps be described as the aborigines, or earliest known inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley.”¹²⁰ Gait observed that the Kacharis are identical to a people known as the Mech in Goalpara and North Bengal. In the Brahmaputra valley the Kacharis call themselves Bodo or Bodo fisa (sons of the Bodo). In the North Cachar Hills they referred to themselves as Dimasa, a corruption of Dima

¹¹⁵ Gait, *History*, 11-15.

¹¹⁶ Gait, *History*, 11-15. See also B. K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam* (Early Period) Vol. 1 (Gauhati: Gauhati University, 1951), 15.

¹¹⁷ Chandana Bhattacharjee, *Ethnicity and Autonomy Movement: Case of Bodo-Kacharis of Assam* (New Delhi: Vikash Publication, 1996), 63. See also Chatterji, *Kirata- Jana*, 97-98.

¹¹⁸ Gait, *History*, 29.

¹¹⁹ Gait, *History*, 74-102.

¹²⁰ Gait, *History*, 242.

fisa or “sons of the great river.”¹²¹ Thus Bodos and Dimasas are quite often referred with hyphenated names, such as Bodo-Kachari and Dimasa-Kachari respectively. Chatterji opines that the name “Kachari” was derived from *Kachar*, meaning “low lands” or “border lands,” which in turn came from the Sanskrit word *kaksa-vata* (*kachada*, *kachar*).¹²² Although the Kachari kings did not leave any written records of themselves, they are referred to in the Ahom Buronji (Ahom History) as two kingdoms that waged war quite frequently. In 1826 CE the British took over Assam. The Bodo kingdom came under British dominion six years later on August 14, 1832. Govindachandra was the last Bodo king of Kachar.¹²³ However, two remaining princely Bodo states, Koch Bihar and Tripura, were only annexed to the Indian Union on August 28 and October 15, 1949, respectively, after two years of Indian independence.

Now, in a postcolonial India, Bodos are at the periphery, at the margin, one of the ethnic and linguistic minorities in Indian Union, classified as one of the plains tribes of Assam. The Bodos were suffocated under the double burden of Sanskritization and colonization. In light of their history, Bodos are currently demanding a separate state of their own, taken from the present state of Assam. There is even a group of Bodos who are demanding a sovereign country independent from the Indian Union. After establishing the perspective of Bodo historiography and looking briefly at Bodo history palimpsestically, now I will turn to the present politico-socio-economic situations of the Bodos.

¹²¹ Gait, *History*, 242.

¹²² Chatterji, *Kirata-Jana*, 123.

¹²³ Bhattacharjee, *Ethnicity*, 71.

III. The Present Politico-Socio-Economic Situations of the Bodos: A Politico-Historical Analysis

At present, the Bodos are undergoing what could best be termed a renaissance of politics of cultural difference. Previous investigation of their history led to the development of a Bodo historical consciousness, which subsequently led to their claims of historical difference. The Bodos' historical consciousness has fueled a series of movements, ranging from peaceful appeals for equal rights to violent demands for self-determination. The modern Bodo intelligentsias' awareness of historical difference has helped shaped an understanding of cultural difference among the Bodos. However, at the same time, due to political pressure at critical junctures, some Bodo nationalist elites have succumbed to the maneuvering of mainstream communities, particularly the Assamese. Thus recent Bodo history has shown tendencies towards both assimilation (sameness) and isolation (difference). Ironically, it was the Bodo nationalist elites who succumbed to assimilation, either religiously or politically or both.

Sanskritization, a religious assimilation to Hinduism, reached its zenith during the reign of the Kachari kings Krishnachandra and Govindachandra, the latter being their last king, and allowed the Bodos who embraced it to raise their social status to Kshatriya, the second highest category in the Hindu caste system.¹²⁴ British historian E. A. Gait claims that Sanskritization/Hinduization among the Kacharis was complete during the reign of Govindachandra.¹²⁵ It is an established fact that among the Bodo-Kacharis, the noble and ruling elites succumbed to Sanskritization, a process that started centuries before the colonial period and continued even after Indian independence.

¹²⁴ Bhattacharjee, *Ethnicity*, 48.

¹²⁵ Gait, *History*, 251.

Modern Bodo political consciousness took definitive shape during the British colonial period, towards the end of 1920s. Modern Bodo political history can be divided into three major phases, leading up to the signing of “Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC)” in February 20, 1993¹²⁶—first, the Tribal League vis-à-vis the Simon Commission or the Indian Statutory Commission; second, the Udayachal Movement, led by the Plain Tribals Council of Assam (PTCA); and third, the Bodoland movement led by the All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU), a non-political students’ organization.

A. The Tribal League (1929-1966): The Memorandum to Simon Commission

The failure of Bodo elites to aggressively present and push for a separate national identity to the Simon Commission, or to the subsequent colonial and national leaders during the Indian freedom movement, remain dark moments in the annals of Bodo history. The Simon Commission, or Indian Statutory Commission, was created in St. James, London, on November 26, 1927. The Simon Commission gave an opportunity to the “primitive and backward tribes” of Assam to submit memorandums and to raise their “voices.”¹²⁷ With that purpose, the members of the Simon Commission arrived in Assam in the latter part of 1928 and the representatives of the Assam’s tribes were allowed to meet the commission members on January 4, 1929. The year 1929, thus, paradoxically was the dawn of the modern Bodo movement, despite being an opportunity that was largely squandered. As Bhattacharjee writes: “In reality the Bodo movement may be identified to have started from the year 1929 with the submission of a memorandum by the Plains

¹²⁶ The creation of the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC), 1993, was the first ever political entity for the Bodos as a result of political agreement and signing of memorandum of settlement among the Central Government of India, State Government of Assam, All Bodo Student’ Union (ABSU) and Bodo People’s Action Committee (BPAC). In this study, I am confining my work only up to this period.

¹²⁷ Bhattacharjee, *Ethnicity*, 71-74.

Tribals”¹²⁸ to the Simon Commission. However, she also recalls a section of the memorandum that states, “[we] the Bodos, can by no means call us other than Assamese...”¹²⁹ The lost opportunities during this period and, subsequently, the failure to establish a claim for a separate Bodo nation during Indian freedom movement is referred as the “Himalayan blunder” in Bodo history. On the surface it is justifiable to ruefully remember the failure of the Bodo leaders during this period, though it is also important to understand this moment in the complex context of Indian national politics at the time.

Politics in British India during the early twentieth century were heavily influenced by the ethos of Indian nationalism. In the period leading up to 1945, as the Freedom Movement gained ascendancy and the eventual partition of India became clear, the two most powerful voices in Indian politics were the “Indian National Congress” and its elite leaders, who had been advocating for a strong and united India, and the “Muslim League,” who were successful in demanding the separation of Pakistan.¹³⁰ Given that only 16% of ‘Muslims adults’ from ‘Muslim-dominated’ constituencies could exercise their franchise in favor of the creation of Pakistan, this achievement can largely be attributed to the elites of the Muslim League, rather than any sort of mass movement among the Muslim population in general.¹³¹

While these were the big-picture issues in Indian politics at the time, there were also smaller scale affairs dealing with individual provinces, many of which were annexed

¹²⁸ Bhattacharjee, *Ethnicity*, 75.

¹²⁹ Bhattacharjee, *Ethnicity*, 75.

¹³⁰ C. H. Philip and Mary Doreen Wainwright, “Introduction” in Philip and Wainwright, eds., *The Partition of India: Policies and Perspective 1935-1947* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1970), 18-21.

¹³¹ Ramakant Rajan Mohan, “Introduction” in Ramakant Rajan Mohan, ed., *India's Partition: Preludes and Legacies* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1998), 22-23. There is a large body of materials concerning the partition of India with different theories. Subaltern theory, which is recent one, is one of them.

and/or reshaped by the colonial and nationalist elites for the sake of political expediency in the making of India as a nation. In the process it was the subaltern groups that suffered the most, and many of them still feel the after effects of those decisions today. One such move was the plan to annex the Bodo dominated Goalpara district of Assam to Bengal.¹³² As a result, the majority of the Bodo population was given no practical option other than to merge with Assam; hence, “we, the Bodos, can by no means call us other than Assamese...”¹³³ Thus the potential for the Bodos to establish themselves as a separate nation was jeopardized by the interests and actions of colonial and nationalist elites. On the positive note, however, Bodo leaders, as part of the All Assam Plains Tribals League, were able to achieve a political voice and measure of political authority, thanks to the Indian Act in 1935, which reserved five legislative assembly seats for the plain tribes of Assam.

The All Assam Plains Tribals League became the dominant political entity among the tribes both during and after British colonial rule. It was perhaps the first political convergence of the Assam’s tribals in the modern history. The political ideology of the Tribal League was to maintain an independent identity from the national political parties of the time, the National Congress Party of India and the Muslim League, based on a philosophy of cultural difference, and to foster the interests of the tribal groups with a view towards preserving the cultural distinctiveness of the indigenous people. Thus, two primary political groups emerged out of Assam: the National Congress Party and the Tribal League with different political objectives. The former was established by the dominant indigenous group with the goal of “vertical mobilization” and the latter was

¹³² Bhattacharjee, *Ethnicity*, 75.

¹³³ Bhattacharjee, *Ethnicity*, 75.

formed by subaltern groups with the goal of “horizontal mobilization” based on traditional organizations of kinship, ethnicity, and, to some extent territory. Thus, tribal groups (subalterns) sought to establish their own autonomous political domain, which can be termed as the “politics of the people.”¹³⁴

B. The Plains Tribal Council of Assam: The Udayachal Movement (1967-1986)

The second phase of the Bodo political movement took the form of a demand for a Union Territory called Udayachal, an initiative led by the Plains Tribals Council of Assam (PTCA) who are a convergent political party of all the plain tribes of Assam formed in February 27, 1967. Although the Tribal League was able to secure thirty-three tribal belts and fourteen tribal blocks under the provision of the Assam Land and Regulation (Amendment) Act in 1947, its political relevance faded and it officially became a mere socio-cultural organization called the Tribal Sangha in 1954.

As the PTCA launched its demands for autonomy for the plain tribes of Assam, the movement gained momentum instantaneously and spontaneously among the Bodo masses. The PTCA was able to establish itself as the sole custodian of the plain tribals of Assam in the political arena and garnered massive support at the grassroots level for at least the next two decades. The political ideology of PTCA flowed from the concept of cultural difference, with a notion that the unique ethnological identity of the autochthones (subalterns) had to be safeguarded from the domination and subordination of the

¹³⁴ Ranajit Guha, “The Prose of Counter-Insurgency” in Guha and Spivak, eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 37-43. Both forms of political mobilizations, that is, vertical or horizontal involves power differentials. However, local autonomy with horizontal mobilization seems to be closer to the people at grass-root level in terms of delivering services.

dominant group—in this case, the aryanized Assamese community.¹³⁵ Bodos and other subaltern groups in Assam came to understand that their cultures and separate identities were threatened, and that only political autonomy would allow them to be saved. This concern was rooted in the centuries of Sanskritization through coercion and domination that the Bodos had encountered. This fear was magnified when the Assam government passed the Assam Official Language Bill on October 10, 1960, despite vehement opposition from the tribals and other linguistic groups. This bill made the Assamese language the sole official language in Assam (along with English, for an interim period).¹³⁶

Like the Assamese race (Jati), the Assamese language is a hybrid language, having evolved out of a blending between Aryan and Mongolian cultures, and it was the lingua franca among the people of northeast India. The formation of Assamese language began centuries before the arrival of the British and the Baptist missionaries that arrived in that period were instrumental in alphabetizing it. It must be noted that the evolution of the Assamese race, and subsequently the Assamese language, out of a confluence of diverse cultures and the Aryan and Mongolian languages involved coercion and manipulation on the part of the dominant group. Pushing for the assimilation of the tribals into mainstream society via the Sanskrit-based Assamese language was considered a bold political move on the part of the Assam government. It was motivated by a vociferous demand from the Assam Sahitya Sabha (ASS, an Assamese literary organization) but had far reaching repercussions as three new separate states—Nagaland, Meghalaya, and

¹³⁵ See PTCA Memorandum, Chapters 3-4.

¹³⁶ D. K. Chattopadhyaya, *History of Assamese Movement since 1947* (Calcutta: Minerva Associates, 1990), 99.

Mizoram—were carved out of Assam in 1960, 1972, and 1987 respectively.¹³⁷ Yet the Bodos fought relentlessly to make the Bodo language the medium of instruction in education through a literary organization called Bodo Sahitya Sabha, founded on November 16, 1952 at Basugaon, Assam.¹³⁸ Language may not be the sole reason for the bifurcation of Assam, but it reflected a trend in the Assamese community towards the domination and subordination of the tribals, a calculated but grievously mistaken power move that further alienated tribals from the Assamese.

Although, language cannot be the sole basis for defining discrete ethnic and national identities, Max Boehm argues that in the American and European contexts, “it [is] the most important factor in modern nationalism” because “[the] encouragement of [the use of] dialect is somewhat analogous to the regionalists cult of the local homeland. Its exaggeration leads to a dissolution of the nation into a smaller component parts, which may remain independent for a longer or shorter period and thus jeopardize the greater national idea.”¹³⁹ India, however, cannot be directly compared with Europe and the Americas. Postcolonial India tends to become more culturally vibrant and robust when it allows its ethnic and linguistic minorities to flourish. When one language or ethnic group tends towards dominance, separatist and secessionist tendencies arise. An example of this, occurring on the national level, is the Official Languages Act of 1963, which made Hindi the National Language and attempted to impose it as a compulsory throughout the

¹³⁷ Bhattacharjee, *Ethnicity*, 7-10.

¹³⁸ The Bodo language was introduced as a medium of instruction for the secondary stage of education on September 23, 1968 and then at the university level, and finally granted the status of Major Indian Language (MIL) in Guwahati University (GU) in 1977 and in the North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) in 1984.

¹³⁹ E. Sargin and J. Maneymaker, “Language and Nationalist, Separatist and Secessionist Movements” in Raymond E. Hall, ed., *Ethnic Autonomy-Comparative Analysis: The American, Europe and Developing World*, vol. II (New York: Macmillan, 1933), 19.

country.¹⁴⁰ Tamils in the south vehemently opposed the move, even to the point of threatening a secessionist movement. Another example, at the regional level, points to what we have already seen in the case of Assam, where further fragmentation took place because of the imposition of Assamese as the sole official language and medium of instruction. The hegemonic attitude of the Assamese community further alienated the tribals.

With unwavering support from the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) and the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), the PTCA was instrumental in the Bodo language being implemented as medium of instruction at the primary level in schools with high Bodo populations. This achievement was significant for two reasons. First, the restoration of the Bodo language as a medium of instruction enabled the Bodos to establish a distinct linguistic and cultural identity, helping to create new generation of Bodos with a strong investment in this identity, thereby building momentum toward a separate Bodo state.

Second, this change further distinguished the Bodos from the Assamese community and helped to form separate Bodo political entity. Thus, in the case of northeast India in general and Assam in particular, language served as an important signifier of an ethnic identity. In a democracy like India, where states were formed and reorganized on the basis of language, language became highly relevant to matters of political power, authority, and ambition. The erudite and insouciant Assamese elite enrolled illiterate Bodos and other tribes as Assamese people in the voter list of successive censuses following independence in order to skew the demographics—a generous provision, perhaps, but a superimposed one nonetheless. In the next sub-section, I discuss the third phase of Bodo movement led by All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU)

¹⁴⁰ Chattopadhyaya, *History*, 99.

that culminated in the signing of an accord called “Bodoland Autonomous Council,” (BAC) in 1993.

C. The All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU): The Bodoland Movement

The Bodoland movement was the third phase of the Bodos’ struggle for the preservation and development of their separate ethnic and cultural identity; in this case, they were specifically lobbying for a separate Bodo state. The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), a student organization and a non-political party spearheaded the Bodoland movement. The movement gained a prominence under the leadership of Upendra Nath Brahma. Although the Bodo autonomy movement had its origins in the British period, it became substantially more intense during the period when Assam was under the political control of the Assam Gana Parishad (AGP), a regional party controlled by the Assamese community. The AGP was formed mainly by the All Assam Students Union (AASU) and Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AGSP) in 1985 and was the first major regional party to come to power in Assam. While, in power, the AGP government was perceived as anti-tribal in its policy and programs.¹⁴¹ Although, there were tribal leaders within the AGP party and even in the AGP government, tribal groups in general and the Bodos in particular viewed it as vying for Assamese dominance—this despite the AASU and AGSP initially entering into politics focused on issues of illegal immigrants from

¹⁴¹ See *Memorandum* submitted to the President, the Prime Minister and the Home Minister of India by All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU) on November 10, 1987.

Bangladesh (formerly called East Pakistan)¹⁴² and with a concomitant promise of detention and deportation of illegal foreigners if they came to power.

The ABSU initially cooperated with the PTCA in its demands for Udayachal and later with the PTCA Progressive (a break away group from PTCA), for Mishing-Bodoland.¹⁴³ It also cooperated with the United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front (UTNLF) and their demands for Tribal Land. But after failing to unite the divided political parties of the plain tribals of Assam, the ABSU declared its own movement for a separate homeland for the tribals on March 2, 1987, based around the famous slogan “Divide Assam Fifty-Fifty.” The ABSU spelt out its historical, ideological, philosophical, and rational justifications in the form of fifty-three question-answer pairs.¹⁴⁴ These justifications were further elaborated in the “Charter of Demands” submitted to the President, Prime Minister, and Home Minister.¹⁴⁵ The overarching ideological explanation for their demands for self-rule was that the Bodos and other tribes of Assam, the subaltern of the subalterns wanted to be “masters of their own destiny.”¹⁴⁶ Of the ninety-two demands, eighty-nine were related to the socio-economic, cultural, and educational development of the Bodos and other tribes, while only the last three were political in nature. The ABSU gained unflinching support from the Bodo People’s Action Committee (BPAC) and the All Assam Tribal Women’s Welfare Federation (AATWWF)

¹⁴² Bangladesh, formerly called East Pakistan became an independent country in 1971. Illegal immigration from Bangladesh to Assam and other parts of India started right after Indian independence in 1947.

¹⁴³ Mishing is another major tribe in Assam.

¹⁴⁴ See ABSU Memorandum; see also Bhattacharjee, *Ethnicity*, 261-273.

¹⁴⁵ Bhattacharjee, *Ethnicity*, 277-331.

¹⁴⁶ See Question and Answer pair no. 2 in ABSU Memorandum. See also Bhattacharjee, *Ethnicity*, 262.

in the Bodoland movement.¹⁴⁷

The ABSU movement can be seen as a people's movement, a peasant uprising against the domination of Assamese elitism. The memorandums reflected Bodo cultural values rooted in traditional domestic and agrarian life, and also involved a reconstructed historiography that re-signified Bodo ethnic and cultural identities. In light of Ranajit Guha's analysis of subalterns' insurgency, the memorandums of ABSU can be described as the "prose of counter-insurgency."¹⁴⁸ Despite having substantial support among the Bodo peoples, the ABSU's demands were largely ignored by both the state and national governments. The peaceful and democratic movement with prayers and appeals was thus pushed towards violence.

We can identify four features of the Bodoland movement (in different names) from the perspective of subaltern historiography that are reminiscent of earlier peasant revolts in India. First, since the colonial period, peasant uprising had been considered a mere "law and order problem."¹⁴⁹ Such perception is still in vogue under the new form of neocolonialism or internal colonialism found in post-independent India. In the case of the ABSU movement, the Home Minister of Assam, Mr. Bhriku Kumar Phukan gave the Director General of the Assam Police in Assam orders "to adopt a stringent measure to tackle the 'law and order' situation in order to secure security of life and property of the citizens and spare no terrorist from punishment."¹⁵⁰ After carefully studying over a hundred peasant/subaltern uprisings, Guha argues that they have historically been treated

¹⁴⁷ For further information on the role of women in the Bodoland movement, see Susita Sen Choudhuri, *The Bodo Movement and Women's Participation* (New Delhi: Mittal Publication, 2004).

¹⁴⁸ Guha, "The Prose of Counter Insurgency," 56.

¹⁴⁹ Ranajit Guha, *On Some Aspects of Historiography in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), 39.

¹⁵⁰ Bhattacharjee, *Ethnicity*, 124, quoting from Press Release, February 8, 1989, by Home Minister, Government of Assam.

as “periodic outbursts of crime and lawlessness to which all wild tribes are subject.”¹⁵¹ History suggests that subaltern politics tends to be more violent in nature than other movements, due to resistance from subaltern groups to subordination by elites. When the ABSU movement became violent, it destroyed bridges, school buildings, and office buildings, symbols of power and prestige for the ruling class. An examination of peasant movements throughout history suggests that at the onset of violence there is always an effort made to destroy such symbols. Guha calls it the “code of subaltern counter-insurgency,”¹⁵² of which inversion is the principal mode.

Second, many historians describe peasant revolt movements as pre-political. Dipesh Chakrabarty, for instance, points out how, in the 1970’s, Hobsbawm and other European historians described the peasant revolts as “primitive rebellion,”¹⁵³ and described them as pre-political acts that exhibit a “backward” consciousness.¹⁵⁴ Chakrabarty says that Hobsbawm sees it as a “consciousness that had not quite come to terms with the institutional logics of modernity or capitalism.”¹⁵⁵ Subaltern historiography, however, rejects the notion that these movements are pre-political, arguing instead that the nature of collective subaltern resistance is such that it effectively leads to the formation of new political elements among the subaltern groups. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP),¹⁵⁶ although mainly confined to the state of Uttar Pradesh in India can be seen as a new political entity among the Dalits in India. Among the Bodos,

¹⁵¹ Guha, “The Prose,” 46. Guha quotes J. C. Price, “The Churar Rebellion of 1799” in A. Mitra, ed., *District Handbook of Midnapur* (Alipore, 1953), Appendix, iv.

¹⁵² Guha, “The Prose,” 63.

¹⁵³ Chakrabarty, *Habitations*, 9.

¹⁵⁴ Chakrabarty, *Habitations* 9; Chakrabarty quotes E.J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Form of Social Movements in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978), 9.

¹⁵⁵ Chakrabarty, *Habitations*, 9; see also Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 2.

¹⁵⁶ Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) is an Indian political party constituted from Dalit groups and mainly operational within the province of Uttar Pradesh, North India.

new political parties such as the Bodoland Peoples' Front (BPF) and the Bodoland Peoples' Front (Progressive) (BPFP) came into existence as a result of Bodoland movement. Such political momentum hardly suggests a "pre-political" and backward consciousness.

Indian elitist and nationalist historians also followed suit. For example, quoting Anil Seal, Chakrabarty says that the nineteenth century revolts had no "specific political content," being "uprisings of the traditional kind, the reaching for sticks and stones as the only way of protesting against distress."¹⁵⁷ Marxists historians, on the other hand, explained these gestures as expressing false consciousness or performing a "safety-valve" function in the overall social system.¹⁵⁸ As part of the colonial legacy, subaltern groups in India find themselves constrained by both hierarchy and oppression sustained by "the logic of the quasi-liberal legal and constitutional framework" inherited from the British regime. Such oppressions occur through "the direct and explicit domination and subordination [on] the less powerful through both ideological-symbolic means and physical force"¹⁵⁹ in the form of new colonialism. Peasant revolts like that of the Bodos aim to counter systems of domination and subordination.

Third, according to Antonio Gramsci "the history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic," and revolts or movements are no exception.¹⁶⁰ Gramsci is of the opinion that the inherently fragmented and episodic experience of subaltern groups is the reason for their inability to come together as a united whole.

¹⁵⁷ See Chakrabarty, *Habitations*, 10, who quotes Anil Seal, *Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 1.

¹⁵⁸ Chakrabarty, *Habitations*, 10, see also Guha "The Prose of Counter Insurgency" in Guha and Spivak, eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies*, 45-86.

¹⁵⁹ Chakrabarty, *Habitations*, 10.

¹⁶⁰ Antonio Gramsci, *Selection from the Prison Notebooks*, 1st edition, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowel Smith (New York: International, 1971), 52- 55.

Furthermore, he opines that they cannot unite until they are able to become a “state.” There is a tendency towards unification, but the ruling class continually thwarts this tendency. So even when they appear to be triumphant, the subaltern groups are left exhausted and captive to their own anxiety about defending themselves. The tribal movements in Assam have borne out Gramsci’s thesis; having been fragmentary and episodic in nature. The Tribal League was the frontrunner of the tribal movements from 1929 to 1954, followed by the PTCA from 1967 to 1986 and the ABSU from 1987 to 1993. The Bodoland movement, led by the ABSU and BPAC, was further fragmented because the Bodos did not involve the other tribes of Assam, because, they felt it was too late to wait for others for movement. The ABSU movement was also episodic, as the movement lasted for less than a decade (1987-1993), consummating in the signing of a memorandum of settlement on February 20, 1993 in the name of “Bodoland Autonomous Council” (BAC), by a group of leaders for the ABSU and BPAC, the State Government of Assam, and the Central Government of India. Although several national and regional political parties and organizations, as well as some top leaders in the Bodoland movement praised the memorandum of settlement, there was a deep-seated dissatisfaction within the rank and file of the movement leaders and Bodo masses. The fact is that the activists were mainly students and peasants, and in the later periods of the movement they began to feel collective exhaustion. Further, the frequent strikes (bandhs) called by the ABSU as part of their strategy represented a serious drain on the peasant economy. This, notwithstanding, the 1993 memorandum of settlement was the first political settlement for the Bodos.

The valorization of fragmentation in subaltern historiography, however, has

invited two major criticisms in India. First, like Marxists elsewhere, Indian Marxists charge that the postmodernist valorization of fragmentation, when applied to subaltern history or their movements, hurts the unity of the oppressed classes. They believe that any study of the history of oppressed classes should help to create unity among them by finding global and totalizing causes and means to resist their oppressors.¹⁶¹ Over privileging differences undoubtedly engenders fragmentation, leading to what Reynolds calls a “pluralism of dispersion.”¹⁶² However, in places like India and elsewhere, where democratic norms prevail (even if their manifestations are imperfect), societies are already fragmented. These societies therefore “cannot be united artificially by a Marxism that insists on reducing the many diverse experiences of oppression and marginalization to the single axis of class or even to the triple axes of class, gender and ethnicity.”¹⁶³ As such, the agenda of subaltern historiography is not so much to promote fragmentation, but rather to address the already fragmented and marginalized nature of subaltern groups’ issues. A second Marxist criticism asserts that the postmodern and postcolonial valorization of fragmentation would help the cause of Hindu fundamentalist in India. This argument can be justified if the project of postcolonialism is merely about looking into binary forms of categorization: West and East, bourgeois and proletariat, rich and poor, or, in the Indian context, Hindu and other. However, the task of subaltern historiography in company with postcolonialism is to go beyond such reified binaries.

The fourth feature of Bodo movements in both the Udayachal movement and the Bodoland movement were spontaneous, and spontaneity in political action is another

¹⁶¹ Chakrabarty, *Habitations*, 18.

¹⁶² Thomas E. Reynolds, *The Broken Whole: Philosophical Steps Toward a Theology of Global Solidarity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 75.

¹⁶³ Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, 19.

characteristic of the “history of the subaltern classes.”¹⁶⁴ The term spontaneity can be defined in various ways. However, “pure” spontaneity does not exist in history, as is the case with “pure” mechanicity. One of the inherent characteristics that seem to create weakness in spontaneous subaltern movements is the existence of multiple elements of “conscious leadership” rather than any sort of centralized hierarchy.¹⁶⁵ Next, I discuss the economic conditions of the Bodos that led them to the demand for a separate state.

D. Economic Condition

For centuries the Bodos were primarily farmers. They were the first to introduce irrigation systems to northeast India.¹⁶⁶ As agriculture was the mainstay of their economic life, their civilization and culture developed around and centered on farmland and rivers. The names of many places and rivers in Assam suggest that the Bodos built their kingdoms in different parts of Assam, northeast India, and North Bengal and continually had agriculture as the centre of their economy.¹⁶⁷ Ninety percent of Bodos are still agrarian peasants. Because land is paramount in this type of economy, land issues have historically been a central concern for the Bodos, and neither the colonial nor independent governments have been particularly responsive to these concerns.

While the whole economic history of the Bodos and other tribes of Assam is outside the scope of this project, it is important to sketch key aspects as a way of understanding more clearly present economic conditions that led to the demand of separate

¹⁶⁴ Gramsci, *Selection*, 196.

¹⁶⁵ Gramsci, *Selection*, 196.

¹⁶⁶ B. Misra, *Tribes of Assam Plain* (Guwahati: Government of Assam, 1980), 20.

¹⁶⁷ The names of almost all the rivers in Assam, on which Bodos’ economy and culture were built start with the prefix *di*, which means water in Bodo. Starting with the easternmost district of Assam, Dibrugarh, the rivers are named *Dibru*, *Dihing*, *Dijoi*, *Disang*, *Diputa*, *Dikrang*, *Diju*, *Dihong*, *Dibong*, *Dimu*, *Diku*, *Diphu*, *Digarua*, and finally *Tista* (Dista), in North Bengal. See, Endle, *The Kacharis*, 4, Gait, *A History of Assam*, Chatterji, *The Kirata Jana-Kriti*.

state. According to P. Baishya the feudal system first emerged in Assam in the mid-sixth century AD.¹⁶⁸ The feudal system reached its zenith during the Ahom rule, particularly following the late-seventeenth century reign of Gadadhar Sinha, and the tribal societies suffered fragmentation due to the propagation of feudality under the Brahmin culture.¹⁶⁹ The British introduced the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act in 1886, which granted private ownership of property and land to the Zamindars (Feudal lords) and imposed heavy taxes on the peasant society. The shift to a modern economic system centered around private ownership, coupled with the influx of economically influential traders from outside the region, created a class of bourgeois that pushed the tribals, who had originally operated under a communal mode of production, to the fringes. This is the first way in which economic changes impacted the Bodos.

A second source of economic impact concerns land issues. While ninety percent of the Bodos are still dependant on land for their incomes, sixty percent of them do not have adequate land for their subsistence.¹⁷⁰ Although, the Tribal League achieved fourteen tribal belts and thirty tribal blocks of land under the Assam Land Regulation (Amendment) Act of 1947, a law that ensured the protection of land and property of the tribals, the successive Assam governments have never upheld the law. The PTCA, in its memorandum, ruefully alleges that there has been absolute contradiction between the promises of the act and the actions of the authorities.¹⁷¹ Furthermore, illegal immigrants from Bangladesh were allowed to settle in these tribal belts and blocks—a blatant violation of the Act. As alleged by the PTCA, there were gaps in the wording of these

¹⁶⁸ P. Baishya, “Feudal System in Medieval Assam (6th to 12th Century A.D.), in *Proceedings of North-East India History Association*, Eleventh Session (Imphal, 1999), 229.

¹⁶⁹ Bhattacharjee, *Ethnicity*, 56-58.

¹⁷⁰ Daimari, *Pilgrimage*, 8.

¹⁷¹ See PTCA Memorandum, see also Bhattacharjee, *Ethnicity*, 215.

provisions, and the benefits were not well publicized to those whom they were meant to help. Instead, the Assam administration looked the other way due to the voter support that these new immigrants offered.

A third economic factor that marginalized Bodos was industry. While industrialization generally promotes economic development, at least in broad terms, the Bodos and the other tribes of Assam did not benefit from this shift. The occupation of vast arable lands by the Assam Tea Company that started its project in 1834 jeopardized their financial stability, because the local population either refused to work or dismissed from work in tea gardens, prompting the tea companies to bring laborers numbering in the millions from other parts of India, especially the Chota Nagpur area, Bihar, Orissa (now Odisha), and West Bengal.¹⁷² Freedom-loving tribals, who had vast tracts of arable lands systematically taken away by private tea companies, never came to terms with the new industrialized economy. There was also a cultural element involved, with tribals unwilling to tolerate the pejorative term “coolī” that was used to describe laborers in the tea industries.¹⁷³

In this section we have seen how Bodos underwent subjugation and domination in the form of Sanskritization and colonization under the hierarchical Hindu caste system and the British colonialism. The next section will deal with how Sanskritization and colonialism are taking new avatars (form) in the postcolonial and post-independent India.

¹⁷² See H. K. Borpujari, *Assam in the Days of Company, 1826-1858*, Second edition (Gauhati: Spectrum Publications, 1980), 244. Borpujari mentions that Bodos were employed in tea factories from 1843-59 in the Darrang district but their monthly payment was just Rupees 2.50 to 3.50. When Bodos went on strike for hiring rate tea companies just dismissed them from job and brought laborers from Chota Nagpur.

¹⁷³ The tea garden employers used a derogatory and pejorative term “coolī” for tea garden laborers. Rev. G. R. Kemphor mentions the term “coolī” in his notes “Among the Kacharis.” See P. K. Bhobora, *The Unpublished Notes of Rev. G. R. Kemphor* (Odalguri: Public Health and Engineer Department, 2010), Chapter Four, 29-56. Rev. Kemphor (1862-1935) was the first Baptist missionary among the Kacharis in Odalguri area from American Baptist Foreign Mission Society.

IV. New Avatars (Forms) of Sanskritization and Colonialism, and the Subalterns

In the previous section, I have shown how the Bodos and other marginal groups were suffocated under the double burden of Sanskritization and colonization. Both of these forces have taken new forms in post-independent India. In what follows, I will discuss the impact of these new forms of Sanskritization and colonialism.

A. New Form of Sanskritization: The Hindutva Movement

Even after the independence of India, the process and practice of Sanskritization continued. Before and during the Indian freedom movement the process was justified by appeals to assimilation and national integration; after independence, it was primarily justified using Hindutva ideology, which identified it as a defining factor of “Indianness.” The Sangh Parivar, a Hindu Joint Family,¹⁷⁴ tried to define Indianness within the context of Hindutva ideology. The Sangh Parivar argues, “Hindutva or Hindu cultural nationalism by definition assumes that in India, Hindus are not just a religious community among many, like the Muslims and Christians but a nation by themselves with Hinduism as a signifier.”¹⁷⁵ Because the primary goal of Hindutva agenda is to establish Hindu Rastra (Hindu Nation) and Hindu Raj (Hindu State), with an objective of “One Nation, One Culture and One Religion,” their approach demands loyalty from religious minority groups such as Muslims, Christians, Tribals, and Dalits.¹⁷⁶ Hindutva is

¹⁷⁴ Sangh Parivar is a pro-Hindutva group comprised of Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh, (RSS), 1925; Viswa Hindu Parishad, (VHP, World Hindu Council), 1964; Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), 1980; Shiva Sena, (Army of Siva) 1984; Bajrang Dhall, (Team of Hanuman) 1984; Durga Bahini, (Brigade of goddess Durga), 1990.

¹⁷⁵ J. Kuruvachira, *Politicization of Hindu Religion in Postmodern India* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2008), 2.

¹⁷⁶ C. P. Bhambhri, *Hindutva: A Challenge to Multicultural Democracy* (Delhi: Shipra Publications, 2003), 4; see also Kuruvachira, *Politicization*, 128.

equated with “national consciousness.”¹⁷⁷ The Hindutva ideology does not accept equal democratic citizenship of all Indians irrespective of caste, creed, religion, sex, or language: instead it operates under the basic belief that India is a Hindu country and “others” must fall in line with the Hindutva ideology if they are to remain in India.¹⁷⁸

To achieve their goals the Sangh Parivar carry out their agenda through cultural (RSS), religious (VHP), political (BJP), and women’s programs (Durga Bahini) in the context of Hindutva ideology. To bolster its agenda, the Sangh Parivar has revitalized exclusivist concepts found in various Hindu scripture and their agenda is anti-multiculturalist/pluralist, anti-democracy, and anti-minority. Their agendas target, “especially the Muslims, Christians, Communists, Dalits and Tribals.”¹⁷⁹

Renewed attempts at Sanskritization reached their zenith under the BJP rule in 1999-2004. Sangh Parivar pushed Hindutva through an educational enterprise called Saffronisation of Indian Education and through the Vidya Bharati, an RSS-controlled educational network.¹⁸⁰ The main objective was to encourage Hindu cultural nationalism among young people by changing the curricula of educational institutions. Towards that end, history textbooks were re-written to support their ideology. In the *Sanskar Sourav* text book series, the pluralistic nature of Indian culture is obfuscated; instead, the books present the ideas of M. S. Gowalkar, a RSS ideologue, who says, “we are one, our culture is one, our tradition is one, our life-current is one, and we have but one history.”¹⁸¹ As early as 1939, Gowalkar exhorted his followers to “re-write our history ourselves.”¹⁸² The

¹⁷⁷ Kuruvachira, *Politicization*, 127.

¹⁷⁸ Bhambhri, *Hindutva*, 3-4.

¹⁷⁹ Kuruvachira, *Politicization*, 3.

¹⁸⁰ Kuruvachira, *Politicization*, 126-189.

¹⁸¹ Kuruvachira, *Politicization*, 158.

¹⁸² Kuruvachira, *Politicization*, 153.

Sangh Parivar believes that the religious minorities and tribal groups are “second class citizens” in their own country, and that they must earn the goodwill and sympathy of the Hindu majority if they want to ensure their “survival.”¹⁸³ The Hindutva idea of “One Nation, One Culture, and One Religion” is at odds with a multi-nation concept of the nation-state and it is a threat to the plural, diverse, culturally robust, multi-lingual, multi-religious, multi-regional, and multi-national India. In what follows, I will discuss how colonialism is taking new shape in the form of neocolonialism/internal colonialism.

B. Neocolonialism/Internal Colonialism and the Subalterns

Robert C. Young points out that the term neo-colonialism was first introduced in 1961 in postcolonial literatures, four years after Ghana became the first independent country in Africa. Ghanaian freedom fighter Kwame Nkrumah developed and expanded the term in 1965 in his work. Nkrumah was instrumental in pressuring the British to leave Ghana without a single shot being fired. Subsequently, however, he found that his political power was only nominal and that the country was still economically dependent on the old empires through multinational and transnational companies.¹⁸⁴ Young quotes Nkrumah: “Neo-colonialism is ... the worst form of imperialism. For those who practice it, it means power without responsibility and for those who suffer it, it means exploitation without redress.”¹⁸⁵ Nkrumah argues, “The essence of neocolonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus political policy is directed from

¹⁸³ Bhambri, *Hindutva*, 59.

¹⁸⁴ Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2001), 44-49.

¹⁸⁵ Young, *Postcolonialism*, 44, Young quotes Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Heinemann, 1965), xi.

outside.”¹⁸⁶ While old imperialism was overt and direct, neocolonialism is covert and indirect, while at the same time being subtle and coercive.

After the departure of the British, the Indian ruling class continued to exercise domination and subordination over the subaltern groups in the country through various quasi-liberal institutions. In India, the impact of neocolonialism is perhaps felt most in the economic sphere, where the ruling elite primarily controls the economy.

The much-touted development and growth of the Indian economy is a testament to neocolonialism as internal colonialism. The triad of globalization, liberalization, and privatization cultivated this growth, fostered in the 1980s by the Indian National Congress Party, and bearing fruit in the 1990s under the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government, which promoted a well-orchestrated Hindutva ideology, particularly during the rule of the BJP led NDA government from 1999-2004.

Traditionally, the economic policies of the BJP were based on Hindutva ideology with a nationalist outlook and posture and that was opposed to globalization, liberalization and privatization. However, when the BJP came to power for the third time, they not only shifted their economic policies but also grabbed the opportunity to promote Hindutva ideology among the booming Indian upper and middle classes and the Hindu diasporas.

Anand Teltumbde, in his essay, “Hindutva, Dalits and the Neoliberal Order,”¹⁸⁷ discusses the ways in which Western neoliberalism helped the BJP with this promotion. He points out that, although the relationship between Hindutva and neoliberalism appears robust, it is actually mutually exclusive. While Hindutva is “ostensibly xenophobic and

¹⁸⁶ Young, *Postcolonialism*, 46; see also Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Heinemann, 1965), ix.

¹⁸⁷ See Anand Teltumbde, “Hindutva, Dalits and the Neoliberal Order” in Anand Teltumbde, ed., *Hindutva and Dalits: Perspectives for Understanding Communal Praxis* (Kolkata: Samya, 2005), 46-74.

inward looking,” neoliberalism is essentially outward looking; and while “the former brags the greatness of Hindu culture and traditions... the latter affirms the developmental prowess of international trade and global culture.”¹⁸⁸ Teltumbde contends this irony is felt most by those who suffered under both. In India its impact was two fold: the rising rate of communalism due to the Hindutva ideology, which culminated in the burning of an Australian Missionary and his two sons in Odissa and the carnage in Godhra, Gujarat in 2002; and the devastating impact of globalization on the poor masses. Although the Sangh Parivar had the Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) formed to present a Hindutva economic policies which appeared strongly opposed to modernization and globalization, the BJP-led NDA government moved its economic policy forward out of fear of losing the support of the booming Indian middle class, who were benefitting immensely from globalization, liberalization, and privatization. Thus, ironically, neoliberalism found a wonderful ally in fascist Hindutva ideology¹⁸⁹ and the poor, tribals, Dalits, and other marginalized groups in India have become victims of neocolonialism/internal colonialism fostered by neoliberalism and furthered by Hindutva ideology.

Conclusion: Significance of History/Narrative in Epistemology

In this chapter I have discussed Bodo history as a part of the subject constitution and formation of its peoples in light of subaltern historiography, employing Iggers’ postmodern understanding of history as a cultural history/story in an effort to portray historical and present socio-economic and political contexts. However, a question arises: what is then the significance of history/narrative to the epistemology of subaltern groups

¹⁸⁸ Teltumbde, *Hindutva*, 49.

¹⁸⁹ Teltumbde, *Hindutva*, 54-57. See for the debate on whether Hindutva movement is fascist or not in pages, 56-57.

such as the Bodos? Put differently, what is the role of history/narrative in Bodos' self-awareness and knowledge of the world? Can the history/narrative of a subaltern group be a signifier for its epistemology, its approaches to the world? How do we locate the role of subaltern history/narrative in pedagogy, in methods and approaches aimed toward self-conscious knowledge? Following Bhabha, I will sum up below the significance of subaltern history/narrative in epistemology in three distinct ways.

First, in pedagogical settings the history/narrative of subaltern or any other group serves as a "liminality of the people" or "threshold." It was once the case that scientific and objective histories were considered the only valid histories, while the narratives/stories of subalterns were disavowed. Now, however, subaltern narratives/histories serve as pedagogical objects, as there is interest in rediscovering the contents of their own ways of coming to the world and remembering who they are. This also provides an avenue for subalterns to be performative subjects of their own pedagogy by discovering categories of knowledge in their cultural symbols and idioms. However, it must be admitted that the goal of such an endeavor is not to claim any supremacy but only to serve as the agency of a cultural event, or the medium of continuity in a community or a tradition.¹⁹⁰ The role of narratives/stories in epistemology is to perpetuate the continuity of tradition(s) of a community; historical "objectivity," in this context is largely irrelevant.

Second, the subaltern narrative contests the genealogies of origin that led to claims of cultural supremacy and historical priority. Subaltern discourse, thus, "sets the act of emergence in the antagonistic *in-between* of image and sign, the accumulative and

¹⁹⁰ Bhabha, *Location*, 216-217. A narrative functions as a "liminality" of the people as it provides memory of the past as well as a vision for the future in a community.

the adjunct, presence and proxy”¹⁹¹ with the majority/dominant culture(s). In other words, in the subaltern pedagogical landscape, history/narratives serve as an act of subversion in an antagonistic way by questioning the images and signs that are portrayed about “others” and are projected upon them (whether as a real presence or by proxy) in so-called mainstream epistemological categories. Subaltern history/narratives in this way seek strategically to shake off colonial knowledge that subjugates cultural self-awareness.

Third, the fragmentary and disjunctive nature of subaltern history/narrative leads to “the insurmountable extremes of storytelling,” highlighting the question of “cultural difference;” however, this must not be understood as a “free play of polarities and pluralities in the homogeneous empty time of the national community.”¹⁹² The main objective when encountering cultural difference “is to rearticulate the sum of knowledge from the perspective of signifying position of the minority [subaltern] that resists totalization.”¹⁹³ This may sound like a kind of repetition, but that repetition “will not return as the same, the minus-in-origin that results in political and discursive strategies where adding *to* does not add up but serves to disturb the calculation of power and knowledge, producing other spaces of subaltern signification.”¹⁹⁴ In other words, the action and process of questioning the sum of knowledge of dominant culture or discourse is a discursive strategy by which the position of minority/subaltern is (re)signified and through which are produced other spaces for subalterns. The action and process of questioning the dominant culture/discourse may seem like repetition, but it actually resists totalization and disturbs the calculation of power and knowledge interlarded in the

¹⁹¹ Bhabha, *Location*, 225-226.

¹⁹² Bhabha, *Location*, 225-233.

¹⁹³ Bhabha, *Location*, 225-233.

¹⁹⁴ Bhabha, *Location*, 232-233.

differing power structures.

The crux of the matter is that the role of the history or narrative of a given community frames an epistemology or way of knowing that, on the one hand provides a liminal experience or threshold that cultivates a sense of shared identity and perpetuates continuity of tradition, and, on the other, contests genealogies of origin on the part of those who claim historical and cultural dominance. The next chapter will address how continuity of tradition can take place in epistemological frames among the Bodos, particularly in the form of a community work called “saori.”

Chapter Two

Bodo Saori and its Pedagogical Dimensions

Cultural studies requires us to consider, not only pedagogy as a cultural practice, but the pedagogy of cultural practices.¹⁹⁵

Introduction

One warm and humid May evening in 1987, in the obscure, tiny village of Baligaon, Assam, India, where I was born and brought up the stage was all set for twelve young women and men to make an individual and personal decision to embrace the Christian faith. Their interest made me feel satisfaction in knowing that my labor of sharing my faith in Jesus Christ did not go in vain. I invited each one to make his or her personal decision and express his or her commitment to Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. One after another they started announcing their individual decisions and I was happy that they were courageous enough to make them. Then it was Dondi's turn, a young man from whom I was expecting the same response. However, to my surprise, Dondi instead asked a question, "Who will help us in saori, if we become Christian?" As an independent young man, who had no intention of living an agrarian village life, I shot back with an answer: "We will help ourselves in saori." But this did not convince him and he never became Christian. Dondi, a young man, who had faced no opposition to becoming Christian from family members, could not make an individual decision due to social and community obligations. Dondi feared that if he became Christian his family

¹⁹⁵ Lawrence Grossberg, "Introduction: Bringin' it All Back Home—Pedagogy and Cultural Studies" in Henry A. Giroux and Peter McLaren, eds., *Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies* (London, New York: Routledge, 1994), 1-21.

would be ostracized and forfeit saori. Another member of the group of Christians, Shewali, a young woman, did indeed face opposition from family members and expressed fear over being ostracized in this way. She, in fact, ended up being physically beaten by her family. This was an eye-opening experience for me, one that, challenged me to take a fresh look at the role and importance of saori in the community life of the Bodos.

A community work, commonly called saori or chaori and described by Sidney Endle as a highly efficient and inexpensive “Public Work Department,”¹⁹⁶ has long been at the centre of Bodo socio-economic and cultural life. Saori is a traditional form of service exchange within a community that includes minor or major rituals. Even in the postmodern, high-tech present, saori is still of enormous importance to the Bodos, not only socio-economically and culturally, but pedagogically as well. As we shall shortly see, its role is connected to but also more than the perpetuation of specific modes of agricultural and technical cooperation among the labor-intensive agricultural process in the Bodo society; saori reinforces a broad sense of community and belongingness.¹⁹⁷

In the first chapter as the background of our study, we explored the role and significance of history/narrative to subaltern epistemology. This second chapter will examine how the Bodos, who we continue to take as representative of the subaltern groups in northeast India, learn in and through saori, the entelechy of Bodo pedagogy. The second chapter consists of six sections. The first section deals with saori as a concept-metaphor or root metaphor. In the second section, I offer phenomenological

¹⁹⁶ Sidney Endle, *The Kacharis*, with an Introduction by J. D. Anderson (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1911), 13. The etymological meaning of saori is discussed in Chapter Five, 273-274.

¹⁹⁷ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1973), 148.

description of saori. In a third section, I describe saori from a Geertzian concept of culture. Then, in the fourth section, I attempt to highlight pedagogical dimensions of saori, followed by a fifth section noting its limitations. Finally, I discuss a few theoretical implications regarding the role of culture in relation to education.

My contention in this chapter is that to make Christian religious education effective, relevant, transformative and emancipatory in postcolonial and postmodern contexts, it has to be carried out within the epistemological categories of socio-cultural elements of a given community. There has to be a shift from pedagogy of culture to pedagogy of cultural practices. In other words we need to derive pedagogical principles from cultural practices of a given community. As saori is one of the key cultural elements of Bodo pedagogy, it is important to analyze its various cultural dimensions and point to its key pedagogical implications for Christian religious education in Bodo churches as well as in the global context. This can be achieved with twin objectives: by analyzing the key features of saori with a Geertzian concept of culture in order to derive pedagogical dimensions and by understanding the theoretical implications of culture in relation to education.

While Chapter One dealt with ideological and historical landscapes, thus leading to the cognizance of cultural difference in the Bodo communities, the current chapter builds from this to deal with the semantics and semiotics of Bodo culture, particularly in and through the concept and practice of saori. A community such as that of the Bodos cannot be viewed from ideological and historical perspectives alone, for the simple reason that we cannot neglect what Jean and John Comaroff call “the complex ways in

which meaning inhabits consciousness and ideology.”¹⁹⁸ The Comaroffs go on to suggest that neither “ideology nor consciousness . . . is merely culture in the active voice,” but rather “products of a process in which human beings deploy salient signs and relations . . . drawn from a structured [or unstructured], largely implicit repertoire of forms that lie below the surfaces of everyday experience.”¹⁹⁹ Categories and events of meaning in culture are connected to and as important as historical relations of power. The point solidifies: “If culture seems to require power to make it complete, then ideology and consciousness seem to require good dose of semantics.”²⁰⁰ Culture is an important feature to consider in examining subaltern epistemology. For the effects of historical study (Chapter One) and the effects of cultural tradition (saori) produce a unity that allows for hermeneutical and pedagogical productivity.

Some semantics and semiotics of culture within a given community may be ubiquitous and explicit in their concept and practice; however, some may be implicit and lie quiescently beneath the surface, powerful nonetheless. They can be both extrinsic and intrinsic depending on the interpretations and applications of a given community, and they may change with temporal and geographical shifts. While the potent role and power of meaning must not be overemphasized, its latent role and power also must not be underestimated. By potent, I mean an overt and ubiquitous role of concepts and meanings and by latent, I mean a covert and hidden role of concepts and meanings. This is not to romanticize culture and idolize a culture’s symbols and meanings, as no symbols and meanings (or any ritual) of a culture/community are innocent. As Lawrence Grossberg

¹⁹⁸ Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 20.

¹⁹⁹ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation*, 20-21.

²⁰⁰ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation*, 20-21.

rightly observes, “while cultural studies refuses to assume that people are cultural dopes, it does not deny that they are often duped by culture.”²⁰¹ In this chapter, then, I shall discuss saori as a part of cultural formation and collective agency in Bodo processes of education, critically examining it as a root metaphor with many explicit and implicit implications. The agenda here is not to romanticize and essentialize saori and its pedagogical dimensions but highlight its role as a part of the formation of subaltern subjectivity and collective agency in the context of Sanskritization and colonization.²⁰² In the following section, I describe saori as a concept metaphor or root metaphor.

I. Saori as a Concept-Metaphor/Root Metaphor

Bodo saori is examined in this chapter as both a socio-economic and a cultural phenomenon. It not only provides a structure for socio-economic and cultural life to the agrarian Bodo communities, but it imbues these things with pedagogical dimensions. In Bodo cultural life saori and community are almost synonymous, with the term used for both serious and sundry matters. Children make playful games out of mimicking saori. Saori issues an invitation to families (*saori lingnai*) and actively calls for their participation, which is called *saori jannai* in Bodo. *Saori jannai* can be translated as “eating saori” and it is quite often related to feasting, whether in a community, family, or corporate context. Bodos’ social and domestic life depended much on saori, but at the same time many may not even comprehend its meaning or its socio-economic functions.

²⁰¹ Grossberg, “Introduction,” 6.

²⁰² In this study I have chosen saori as one of the key Bodo cultural components and as a part of cultural retrieval for Bodo epistemology in the context of the experience of Sanskritization and colonization. It is a part of reclaiming their cultural elements as a subaltern group in an environment of historical and cultural subjugation, and thus is a factor in resistance and not the assimilation and domination of others. Therefore, strategically, the question of essentialization and romanticization does not arise.

Saori, with its community-oriented templates can be considered a concept-metaphor or what Dipankar Gupta calls a “root metaphor” of Bodo socio-economic and cultural life. Taking cues from Stephen Pepper (1942), Dipankar Gupta uses the concept of a root metaphor to understand and describe cultures. There can be several root metaphors in a given community, as human beings do not live one-dimensional lives. For Gupta the root metaphors of Indian culture(s) revolve around community and anti-colonialism. Further, Gupta rightly points out that root metaphors, as with all metaphors, are polysemic or multivocal, but not equivocal.²⁰³ Although these are the root metaphors of Indian cultures, they would be perceived and understood differently by different regional and cultural groups. Root metaphors are not just another linguistic device but symbols that evoke affectivity in community life and catechesis, and aesthetic commitments in the literary life of a community.

II. Phenomenological Description of Saori

In this study, saori is seen both as a specific event and a multifaceted concept. As a specific event, it is confined within a particular work accomplished in a family or community. As a concept metaphor it consists of various moral and ethical templates derived from its practices. As an event, saoris can be broadly divided in two types: corporate and familial. The construction of an embankment, canal, or road would be a corporate saori, while constructing a house, planting rice, and harvesting crops are familial saoris. A familial saori can perhaps best be defined as a community work rendered within the community(s) that involves a reciprocal exchange of services

²⁰³ Gupta claims that Stephen Pepper was the first to use the term “root metaphor.” See Dipankar Gupta, *Culture, Space and the Nation-State* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000), 32. See also Stephen Pepper, *World Hypotheses* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1942).

accompanied by minor or major rituals, which fosters solidarity, reciprocity, cooperation, and a sense of belongingness in the society or community. Such templates of solidarity, reciprocity, cooperation and a sense of belongingness can readily be developed conceptually for pedagogical purposes.

There are two types of familial saoris as a community work or event. The first type is the *dighal* (long) *sanguri* or *chaori* or *saori*, where at least one member of each family will lend help from dawn to dusk to the family who summons saori.²⁰⁴ The second type, called a *gatha system*, is a system in which villagers work in co-operation on agricultural activities.²⁰⁵ Each family is assigned a day for which they are responsible. Familial saoris are reciprocal in nature and involve an exchange of labor that is expected of community members but is not strictly enforced. A comprehensive definition that includes both corporate and familial saoris may run as follows: A saori is a reciprocal and obligatory community work rendered for families and communities by the families and communities, involving minor or major rituals, for the perpetuation and maintenance of socio-economic and cultural life and which foster solidarity, reciprocity, cooperation, and a sense of collective identity among the communities. Thus, saoris are performative glue for communal life, which is what makes saori function also as a root metaphor for Bodo people, crystallizing representative values and meanings.

Familial saoris revolve around the structure of families, which can often mean extended families, all of who participate in providing economic viability. Familial saoris are basically confined to extended families and kith and kin in a community of the same

²⁰⁴ Chandana Bhattacharjee, *Ethnicity and Autonomy Movement: Case of Bodo-Kacharis of Assam* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1996), 37-38.

²⁰⁵ Bhattacharjee, *Ethnicity*, 37-38.

ethnic, religious and social grouping. Further, they are mainly agricultural in nature and household related, such as, rice planting, harvesting, uprooting of saplings, house construction and firewood splitting (especially on the occasion of wedding), etc. To make the discussion concrete, we will look at two specific familial saoris, a rice planting saori and a harvesting saori. Then I will offer a general description of corporate saori.

A. Familial Saoris: Belongingness in Solidarity and Reciprocity

1. Rice Planting (Mai Gainai) Saori

This saori generally takes place in the summer rainy season that runs from April to August, and covers two crops: Acu and Sali. Even at a time when India is sending missions to the Moon and Mars,²⁰⁶ there are scores of Indian farmers who still live a traditional agrarian lifestyle, an odd dichotomy that typifies the idea that “Indians are capable of living in several centuries at once.”²⁰⁷ Although India is technologically advanced in many ways, including in the agriculture sector, such technology is beyond the reach and means of millions of Indian agrarian communities. One can still witness peasants working together in the paddy fields during rice season with bullocks and oxen.

In a rice plantation saori, the preparation of the paddy field for planting may take weeks. When the field is ready, the head of the family summons the villagers for a saori on a particular day. At dawn first the men of the village would arrive in the paddy field (*dubli*) with their oxen and ploughs to prepare the field for plantation. Then, after an hour or so, the women of the household arrive at the field, followed by the women of the

²⁰⁶ On October 22, 2008 and November 5, 2013, India launched its first unmanned Moon Mission (Chandrayan I) and Mars (red planet) Mission (Mangalayan) respectively.

²⁰⁷ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial thought and Historical difference* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 49. The statement occurred in the *Wall Street Journal*, 11 October 1996.

village. If it is a joint family of brothers then the wife of the eldest offers two areca nuts and a pair of betel leaves (*goi jora, phathoi jora*) in the name of *Mainao*,²⁰⁸ the goddess of wealth, and applies a little mustard oil to some seedlings before saluting to the east. After this simple ritual, planting begins.²⁰⁹ The saori may last for eight to ten hours, depending on the size of the paddy field. While the men are plowing, the women are busy planting, which involves much fun and merry making. After the work is completed, both men and women enjoy a ceremony in which they throw mud over one another, a reminder that human beings are part of mother earth. If it is the final day of planting and the end of plowing (*hali garnai*) for the season, then a feast with pork, chicken, and rice beer (*zau* or *zumai*) follows. This endeavor is referred to in folk songs sung in both the sunny and rainy seasons. Anil Boro, in his work *Folk Literature of the Bodos*, mentions songs related to agricultural work. The following folk song recalls the courage and determination involved in this type of saori:

*[Both] men and women
let's work together
And plough the new plot of land
And plant summer crops
like zoha [zwsa] and bora [maibra]
plant all the varieties.
O' friends, plant all the varieties.*²¹⁰

However, peasant life is not generally full of fun and amusement. These songs also express the hardships that occur when crops are destroyed by wild animals and natural calamities. They express the wretched condition of the people who suffer in these

²⁰⁸ Goddess Mainao is a household deity, second highest in Bodo pantheon, consort of Bathau or Sribrai. See Endle, *Kacharis*, 37.

²⁰⁹ Kameswar Brahma, *A Study of Socio- Religious Beliefs, Practices and Ceremonies of the Bodos* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1992), 115.

²¹⁰ Anil Boro, *Folk Literature of Bodos* (Guwahati: N. L. Publications, 2001), 111. Format and italics are as in the original text.

circumstances and the sorrows they experience:²¹¹

*[Not] being afraid of the sun
and the shower of the rainy days
we plant the crops and pull out the crops to plant
But still then we have to starve
O' cursed [wretched] fate of ours!*

Bodo society, as a peasant society still dependent on agriculture, ascribes their miseries and misfortune to fate in a passive and resigning manner, evocative of both the Hindu understanding of fate (*Bhaigya*) and Taoism.

2. Harvesting (Mai Hanai) Saori

The harvesting saori usually takes place in the months of December and January, the coldest part of the Assam's winter, when the *sali* crop is harvested. Sali, which is also called *maima* (mother crop), is the main crop for the Bodos. Sidney Endle observed that saori was summoned not only for the construction of embankments and canals but also in harvesting in cold weather rice-crop in December and January. He observed how people responded to summons for saori with readiness and cheerful heart and worked in harvesting saori with jest and merry in one line numbering from ten to fifty men, cutting paddy with sickles.²¹² While, the men are busy cutting the rice, the women provide delicious food and much-prized rice beer in unlimited quantities to the reapers. While the ritual in the rice planting saori occurs at the beginning, in the harvesting saori a simple ritual is observed at the end. A little bunch of paddy is left in a corner of the field as an offering to the goddess of wealth. This reaffirms the cyclical view of Bodo life, which begins at the rice planting and then culminates in harvesting and thus anticipates each

²¹¹ Boro, *Folk Literature*, 111. Format and italics are as in the original text.

²¹² Endle, *Kacharis*, 13.

other in the cycle of events of a community life.

Besides the two discussed here, other types of saori include *khotiya saori* (uprooting rice seedlings), *nou saori* (house construction), and *bon saori* (firewood splitting), all of which are familial saoris. As has been pointed out by Endle, who observed Bodo communities keenly for four decades, people respond to saoris readily and cheerfully, and therefore it is neither a surreptitious nor precarious form of exchange.

B. Corporate Saoris: Solidarity beyond Family and Ethnic Boundaries

The construction of dams, embankments, canals, roads, and other similar projects are corporate saoris. In a sense corporate saoris can be likened to the public sphere of modern civilization while familial saoris can be likened to the private sphere. However, private sphere is not used here purely in an individualistic sense, but rather refer to a network of family (both immediate and extended) and kin. Corporate saoris, on the other hand, generally include several villages and different communities. In them, transactions take place among different tribes, cultures, language groups, and even different castes, which foster solidarity beyond family and ethnic boundaries. Corporate saoris are basically an economically driven enterprise with cumulative effects that build up the larger community. Corporate saoris, unlike familial ones, are compulsory and obligatory; thus non-compliance incurs fines, and a continued lack of participation may result in ostracism as an extreme punishment. In this section, I have defined and described both familial and corporate saoris. In the next section, I examine saori with conceptual tools that will deepen its pedagogical implications.

III. An Analysis of Saori through a Geertzian Concept of Culture

As the purpose of this chapter is to highlight the pedagogical dimensions of saori, I shall analyze it from an anthropological perspective, based on the works of Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner. Dipankar Gupta, among other critics, observes that Geertz defines culture in terms of “human behavior,” generally based on the semiotics (symbols) and semantics (meanings), which is also can be described as a “grammatical” rendition that deals with specific meanings and symbols of any given community.²¹³ But for Gupta culture is essentially a social interaction of communities, centered on one or more root metaphors. Gupta argues that a Geertzian concept of culture based on “human behavior” and “grammatical” renditions looks at culture as “a stabilized phenomenon without much scope for internal strain and dissensions” and is thus not enough to account for culture in the complex and changing social patterns of communities, which requires looking at the different parameters of ideologies at work.²¹⁴ That said, taking a cue from Comaroff and Comaroff, I argue that we still need to define and describe culture in terms of semiotic and semantic functionally because a community operates within the dialectics of culture (semantics) and consciousness (ideology) as well as convention (tradition, continuity) and invention (contemporaneity, change).²¹⁵ We must, therefore, look at the culture of a community not in terms of “either-or” but “both-and,” where the elements of continuity (convention and grammatical continuity) and change (strains and inventions) run throughout. When saori is viewed through the works of Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner as the epicenter of Bodo culture, it can be said to bear a continuity of meanings that can be considered the root metaphor of Bodo culture. But it may also bear different meanings

²¹³ Gupta, *Culture*, 31-32.

²¹⁴ Gupta, *Culture*, 31-33.

²¹⁵ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation*, 9.

that entail change and tensions, where different ideologies of saoris are involved. Therefore, the definitions and meanings put forward about saoris in this study are never meant to be definitive and final.

Geertz and Turner each talk about two major models for human relationships. While, Geertz talks about “social structure” and “culture,”²¹⁶ Turner talks about “social structure”²¹⁷ and “communitas.”²¹⁸ It may seem paradoxical that despite my stated intention to derive the pedagogical dimensions of saori through postcolonial and post-structuralist perspectives, my analysis is based on the works of constructivist and structuralist anthropologists. This can be reconciled in two ways: first, subaltern groups in India are in a process of reinscribing their cultural symbols, meanings, and idioms, in the construction of epistemological categories in art, worship and other areas of their lives. Second, the attempt serves the goal of enabling subject-formation/constitution and collective agency of subalterns, which in turn allows for the revalidating of their cultural elements and narratives and claiming of an alternative knowledge in non-dominant power structures.

Geertz looks at a culture and its elements from semiotic and functional approaches, with an emphasis on the “system in balance, on social homeostasis, and on timeless structural pictures.”²¹⁹ The Geertzian concept depicts culture as a “well-integrated whole” with particular attention paid to its “harmonizing, integrating, and psychologically supportive aspects.”²²⁰ Turner also seems to suggest a symmetrical and

²¹⁶ Geertz, *Interpretation*, 144-145.

²¹⁷ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New Brunswick, USA and London U.K.: Aldine Transaction, 1969), 96.

²¹⁸ Turner, *Ritual*, 132.

²¹⁹ Geertz, *Interpretation*, 143.

²²⁰ Geertz, *Interpretation*, 143.

“well-integrated” concept of culture.²²¹ Geertz makes a distinction between culture and social structure. He defines culture as “an ordered system of meaning and of symbols in terms of which social interaction takes place” and social structure as a “pattern of social interaction.”²²² Culture is defined by the “framework of beliefs, expressive symbols, and values in terms of which individuals define their world, express their feelings, and make their judgments,” while social structure is defined by the “ongoing process of interactive behavior,”²²³ which occurs persistently. Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experiences and guide their actions; social structure is the form in which that action takes place.

Geertz further shows the contrast between culture and social structure by borrowing the terms logico-meaningful integration and causal-functional integration from Sorokin.²²⁴ Logico-meaningful integration refers to sort of integration found in a Bach fugue, in Catholic dogma, or in the general theory of relativity—a unity of style, of logical implication, of meaning and value. Causal-functional integration refers to the kind of integration one finds in an organism, where all the parts are united in a single causal web; each part is an element in a reverberating causal ring, which keeps the system going.²²⁵ The expression of logico-meaningful integration of culture in saori can be found in meanings and values of saoris, particularly manifested in solidarity, reciprocity and mutual cooperation among the Bodos. Causal-functional integration can be referred in connection to various types of agricultural related familial saoris that are found in an integrated way. For example rice-planting saori will eventually lead to harvesting saori

²²¹ Turner, *Ritual*, 132-ff.

²²² Geertz, *Interpretation*, 144.

²²³ Geertz, *Interpretation*, 144.

²²⁴ Geertz, *Interpretation*, 144.

²²⁵ Geertz, *Interpretation*, 144.

reverberating in causal ring. However, it is in causal structure because some families may not summon saori.

The concept of “whole” or “holism” of culture of a community or a group in this study stems from the notion that we cannot characterize the various elements of culture by examining individuals; rather, we must consider the group as, in Kathryn Tanner’s words, “forming some sort of whole.”²²⁶ We must look at what sets a community or a group apart from others—its behaviors and artifacts, the “distinctive manner or way of living that runs through all its isolatable parts.”²²⁷ We must examine what makes a community stand out—its distinctive “patterns or configuration,” “theme,” “style,” “mentality,” or what Ruth Benedict calls “a personality writ large.”²²⁸ However, at the same time we must recognize that in such cases a culture “summed up by generalization” tends to become what Tanner calls a “qualitatively distinct incommensurable.”²²⁹ This means because a culture is conceived as a “whole” based on a theme, style, mentality and patterns or configurations, it bears irreducibly distinct qualities that set it apart from other cultures. This perspective implies that cultures are integrated, in the sense that the various elements of a culture are interrelated or intertwined or self-referencing. There is an internal organization upon which a community or group is built. Furthermore, we can say that a community or a group is kept together by principles of social order, meaning that social coherence and cultural coherence are connected. In sum, cultural coherence and wholeness manifest in various ways: first, as expressed in “a dominant motif, style,

²²⁶ Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 29.

²²⁷ Tanner, *Theories*, 29.

²²⁸ Tanner, *Theories*, 29. Tanner quotes Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1934), 46-47.

²²⁹ Tanner, *Theories*, 30.

purpose or theme”; second, on logico-semantic level through meaning making; third, through formal laws or structures; and fourth, as “functionally integrated”²³⁰ through various cultural forms and norms. Among the agrarian Bodo communities, saori is a dominant cultural and socio-economic theme, providing purpose and fashioning style in community life. It keeps the agrarian Bodo communities functionally integrated through formal and informal cultural forms and norms, acting as a cohesive, despite internal contradictions and differences. The following sub-sections will show how saori and community play out together among the Bodo communities.

A. Saori: An Embodiment of Communitas

The Bodo language, like Chinese,²³¹ does not have an exact equivalent to the English term “community;” however, the concept suffuses all aspects of their cultural life. Saori and community are intrinsically intertwined. Saori is an embodiment of community, and it is reminiscent of what Victor Turner calls “communitas.” As has already been mentioned, according to Turner there are two major models for human relationships: the first is “society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation,” which he terms “structure;”²³² the second, emerging in a liminal period, is society as “an unstructured or only rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders,” and he uses the Latin term “communitas” in place of “community” to express

²³⁰ Tanner, *Theories*, 32-34.

²³¹ Heup Young Kim and David Ng, “The Central Issue of Community: An Example of Asian North American Theology on the Way” in David Ng., ed., *People on the Way: Asian North Americans Discovering Christ, Culture, and Community* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1996), 26.

²³² Turner, *Ritual*, 96.

this dynamic.²³³ Structure and *communitas* are juxtaposed and alternating, but the distinction between the two cannot be reduced to a simple binary.²³⁴ Turner further breaks *communitas* down into three general types: first, existential or spontaneous *communitas*, where members base their relationship on “a happening,” as occurred with hippies in the 1960s; second, normative *communitas*, where members are organized into a sustainable social system in order to achieve time-sensitive goals, motivated by the need to mobilize and organize resources, and the necessity for social control among the members of the group; and third, ideological *communitas*, which is a description one can apply to a variety of utopian models of societies that are based on existential *communitas*.²³⁵ Saori would fall under the umbrella of normative *communitas*, where the members of a community come together, work together and discuss (*saorai* in Bodo) various issues relating to community life, organization, and social control. Among the Bodos, saori can be considered a normative *communitas*, which is in one way anti-structural, as there is no permanent and hierarchical social structure, but also is rudimentarily structured with strong pedagogical elements.²³⁶

B. Ritual Aspects of Saori

In every familial saori either a minor or major ritual is involved. According to Geertz, ritual is a “consecrated behavior” of a community.²³⁷ A community ritual operates with a conviction that religious conceptions and directives are veridical and sound.²³⁸ Rituals are

²³³ Turner, *Ritual*, 96.

²³⁴ Turner, *Ritual*, 96-97.

²³⁵ Turner, *Ritual*, 132.

²³⁶ I am categorizing saoris in Turner’s anti-structure normative *communitas* because there are no permanent and hierarchical structures in saoris, on which they operate.

²³⁷ Geertz, *Interpretation*, 112.

²³⁸ Geertz, *Interpretation*, 112.

manifested in some ceremonial form. These ceremonial forms can be as simple as “a recitation of a myth, the consultation of an oracle, or the decoration of a grave.”²³⁹ In the rice plantation saori, the ritual (offering of nuts and leaves) is a prayer to the goddess of wealth, invoking good weather (rain and sunshine) for good crops, despite no oral prayer being chanted. This ritual reflects the feminine aspect of God. Facing towards the east symbolizes the need for sun to allow the crops to flourish. The application of oil to the seedling suggests life and healing. In the harvesting saori, the ritual offering symbolizes gratitude and thanksgiving to the deity.

In saoris, as in Bodo cultural life in general, work and faith blend together. These rituals support a “general conception of the order of existence”²⁴⁰ that integrates ecology and cosmology, invocation and thanksgiving, and a beginning and an end. The rituals also meet the inner needs of the Bodo families and community and reinforce solidarity among one another.²⁴¹ The Bodo community’s living world and imagined world are fused together to be the same world in these symbolic acts, producing an idiosyncratic transformation in peoples’ understanding of themselves and reality.²⁴² The use of rituals in saori reinforces the traditional familial and social ties among the Bodos. They also stress the way in which the social structure of a Bodo community is strengthened and the understanding of mythic symbolization on which social values of Bodo community rest.²⁴³

People try to derive sense out of communal ritual experiences. They try to give

²³⁹ Geertz, *Interpretation*, 112.

²⁴⁰ Geertz, *Interpretation*, 112.

²⁴¹ Geertz, *Interpretation*, 112.

²⁴² Geertz, *Interpretation*, 112.

²⁴³ Geertz, *Interpretation*, 142, see also E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1915); W. Robertson-Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (London: Black, 1923).

form and order to their conception and perception of cosmos through rituals. Sometime for certain communities ritual can be as real and pressing as the biological needs.²⁴⁴ Further, any religion or ritual celebration is never merely metaphysics. A ritual is “suffused with an aura of deep moral consciousness and bears a sense of intrinsic obligation.” It not only encourages devotion but also demands it. Ritual not only induces intellectual assent but also enforces emotional commitment from individuals.²⁴⁵

As has been stated in the beginning of this chapter, no cultural symbols, meanings or rituals are innocent. While a great deal of ritual importance in community life is discussed, we must be aware of power dynamics and power differentials in any community ritual. We must be aware of the danger of essentializing and permanently fixing tendencies of any particular ritual in a community life. At this juncture Ronald Grime and Catherine Bell’s concept of “ritualization” as a process is more helpful in postcolonial and postmodern contexts, which addresses the ambiguous and complex power relations embedded in ritual performances of a community.²⁴⁶ I will deal this question in the third and fifth chapters in my overall discussion of culture/community.

C. Saori as Rites of Passage: Transition to Adulthood

Corporate saoris—such as construction of embankments, roads and canals—serve often as rites of passage into an adult life. Following Arnold van Gennep, Turner defines *rites*

²⁴⁴ Geertz, *Interpretation*, 140.

²⁴⁵ Geertz, *Interpretation*, 126.

²⁴⁶ For an elaborate discussion on ritual process in a postmodern understanding, see Ronald L. Grimes, “Modes of Ritual Sensibility” and “Liturgical Supinity, Liturgical Erectitude: On the Embodiment of Ritual Authority” in Paul Bradshaw and John Melloh, eds., *Foundations in Ritual Studies: A Reader for Students of Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academics, 2007), 131-165. For details of Grimes’ work, see Ronald L. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1982). See also Catherine Bell, “Ritual, Change, and Changing Rituals: The Authority of Ritual Experts” in Bradshaw and Melloh, *Foundations*, 166-198. Grime and Bell go beyond Geertz and Turner in their understanding of ritual.

de passage as “rites, which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age.”²⁴⁷ Under this definition, the participation in a saori by a Bodo youth signifies a change in social position and age. Bodos generally divide human life into four stages: (1) childhood (*gotho*), (2) youth (*sengra/sikhla*), (3) middle age (*ado bwisw*), and (4) old age (*bwrai/bwroi*). However, there are no strict numerical breaks between the stages. Bodos in the youth stage are considered adults, whether or not they are the constitutionally recognized age of 18. A Bodo is generally considered an adult when she or he is able to shoulder adult responsibility.

Following Gennep, Turner says that these rites of passage or “transitions” are marked by three phases: separation, margin or liminality, and aggregation.

The first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed period in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a state), or from both. During the intervening “liminal” period, the characteristics of the ritual subject (the subject) are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third phase (reaggregation or reincorporation), the passage is consummated.²⁴⁸

However, in the case of saori this strict tripartite understanding is inapplicable, as the emphasis is more on the act of participation than on symbolic rituals. The act of participation itself signifies a transition from childhood to adulthood.

It is the intervening liminal period in saori, in which the person, whoever he or she may be and whatever her or his social standing may be, is equal to all other participants. As a general rule, a man can participate in a harvesting saori when he is able to carry (*mai rwganai*) on a bamboo bar (*hoolabari*) two rice bundles (*mai dangri*) comprised of five layers each (*jab-ba*), with each layer containing six smaller bundles

²⁴⁷ Turner, *Ritual*, 94.

²⁴⁸ Turner, *Ritual*, 94.

(*mai muthi*). Similarly, in a *khotiya saori* (uprooting rice seedlings), the new participant is expected to carry a minimum of twelve *khotiya muthas* (rice seedling bundle), six on each side on the *hoolabari*, a certain distance. The ability and tenacity to carry out such work for a considerable time is normally considered to demonstrate fitness to shoulder adult responsibilities, and consequently readied oneself for married life. Thus participating in a number of *saoris* signifies a transition from childhood to adulthood, and although there is no formal announcement of the transition, at some point the following statement will be made: *amoka-ha dania saori janw haywswi* (now so and so can partake *saori*). Among the three stages of separation, liminality, and aggregation in the *rite de passage*, *saori* most closely reflect the stage of aggregation.

D. The Saorian Ethos and Bodo Worldviews

According to Geertz, anthropologists analyze a culture in terms of ethos and worldview.²⁴⁹ In a given community an ethos is the tone and character, and quality of a community life. The moral and aesthetic style and mood of a community are reflected in community ethos. Through ethos a community expresses their underlying attitude toward themselves and their world.²⁵⁰ A worldview of a community is the “picture of the way things in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society.”²⁵¹ It contains their most comprehensive ideas on the order of things.²⁵² There is an intricate relationship between the two. The ritual aspects of any given culture/community aim to present a worldview that is emotionally acceptable to individuals “as an image of an actual state of

²⁴⁹ Geertz, *Interpretation*, 127.

²⁵⁰ Geertz, *Interpretation*, 127.

²⁵¹ Geertz, *Interpretation*, 127.

²⁵² Geertz, *Interpretation*, 127.

affairs” and that finds authentic expressions in ethos in an intellectually reasonable way.²⁵³ When sacred symbols or rituals relate to an ontology and cosmology, they lead to aesthetics and morality.²⁵⁴

The Bodo ethos could comfortably be called saorian or communitarian ethos. Central to the Bodo ethos is the harmony with cosmos, nature and with one another in community. In the Bodo worldview, human lives are seen as being closely connected with nature in harmony and with one another, and this is reflected in saori. In the story from the beginning of this chapter we can see how Dondi felt a sense of obligation and emotional connection towards saori. The saorian ethos is one of solidarity, reciprocity, and cooperation, manifested spontaneously through the interconnected relationships of family, kinship, and community, relationships that are seen as sacred. However, like in many other South Asian societies, “[population] growth, urbanization, monetization, occupational differentiation and the like, have weakened the traditional ties of peasant social structure”²⁵⁵ of the Bodos. The saorian ethos and worldview of the Bodos is thus ordered and yet not rigid or immune from change; it is “structured yet negotiable, regulated by conventional rules and practices yet enigmatic, fluid,”²⁵⁶ and flexible and also marked with internal conflicts resulting from changes. Because saorian ethos and worldview are flexible and negotiable, containing internal conflicts that allow for contestation and modification, the saorian ethos and worldview resist essentialization for an imperialistic design. We shall discuss this further later on in this study.

²⁵³ Geertz, *Interpretation*, 127.

²⁵⁴ Geertz, *Interpretation*, 127.

²⁵⁵ Geertz, *Interpretation*, 148.

²⁵⁶ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation*, 128.

E. Saori and Building up of a Person in Community

Saori is also concerned with the development of an individual through “work,” (*haba-hookha* or *khamani maonai*), either household or social. Shouldering such responsibility suggests that a man or woman is maturing and progressing toward marriage, after which he or she would carry full adult responsibilities. In Bodo, the term *haba* means both “work” and “marriage,” although each has other terms (*khamani* for “work” and *gwthar juli* for “marriage”). Etymologically, the term *haba* comes from *ha*, meaning a lump of soil or earth, and *ba*, meaning, “carrying on the back” or “shouldering responsibility.” Work in general and participation in saori in particular is seen as the process of building oneself up in relation to others. Participation in saori is thus not an end in itself but a means to develop as an individual and to learn how to relate to others and participate in shared work, thus preparing the worker for adult life. At the same time, the individual cultivates a network of social relations, both immediate and far-reaching. Therefore, saori has both intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions in the building up of an individual’s life. Work in saoris is thus a process of becoming a person and is not just a formal cultural obligation. Therefore, there is an inherent relationship between creative production and regeneration that is fundamental to the Bodo understanding of an individual’s development.

In this section we have seen how saori and Bodo community are glued together in their concepts and functions: saori as an embodiment of community; ritual aspect of saori in community; saori as rite of passage in the community; saorian ethos and worldview in community; and saori and an individual’s building up in community. The next section explores the pedagogical dimensions of saori, which I will apply in later chapters.

IV. Pedagogical Dimensions of Saori for Subalterns

In seeking to unpack the pedagogical dimensions of saori, I am attempting to uncover and reclaim subjugated knowledge and to explore epistemological categories embedded in saori. Bodos derive their knowledge mainly through the activities of community life, and their ethical templates primarily come from experiences like that of saoris. However, the knowledge derived from the ethos and practice of saori, the root metaphor of the Bodo community, needs to be understood and defined pedagogically, and questions of strategy and practice as well as scholarship must be developed systematically in order to radically transform Christian religious education in the Bodo churches. This requires taking the matter of experience seriously, gained in and through community life, as a source for knowledge.²⁵⁷ And experience is rooted in cultural frameworks.

Connected to its socio-economic dimensions as specific work or event, conceptually saori has various pedagogical dimensions. It encourages and normalizes mutual help and cooperation. Sidney Endle comments that “this whole system of mutual help in time of pressure is a marked feature of Kachari [Bodo] social and domestic life,”²⁵⁸ though it is not only during the time of pressure that saori is called. For example, community fishing in leisure time is still in vogue among the Bodos, like many other tribal communities in northeast India.²⁵⁹ There are thus a number of educational dimensions that we can derive from saori. However, I am going to confine myself to

²⁵⁷ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “On Race and Voice: Challenges for Liberal Education in the 1990s” in Henry A. Giroux and Peter McLaren, eds., *Between Borders: Pedagogy and Politics of Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 145-166.

²⁵⁸ Endle, *Kacharis*, 14.

²⁵⁹ Harka Bahadur Chetri Atreya, *The Bodos of Assam: A Socio-cultural Study* (Kolkatta: Towards Freedom, 2007), 134.

eight key features of saori for pedagogical dimensions. Here, I will mention them briefly, because, I will describe these dimensions elaborately when I develop Christian religious education theory in Chapters Five and Six.

A. Integrative Nature of Saori

The first pedagogical dimension of saori is its dialectically *integrative* nature. In our discussion of saori in the previous sections we have seen the various features of dialectical integration of saori. Saori is ritualistic but pedagogical, community oriented but enabler of an individual's personal development. It is economically driven cultural phenomenon but community practice oriented with moral and ethical templates. It is a traditional cultural practice but suited for contemporary needs. So saori dialectically connects both past tradition and present circumstance in the Bodo society. The dialectically integrative nature is a core value in the concept of saori. Based on this core nature of integration in saori, I will develop an integrative model of Christian religious education in Chapter Five.

B. Community Feature

The second pedagogical dimension of saori is its *community* feature. In the previous sections we have noticed that saori and community are synonymous. Saori is an embodiment of *communitas* or community. For the Bodos there cannot be a saori without a community or vice versa, particularly in rural areas. So saori and community are mutually inclusive and integral to one another. As we have seen, in India community is a root metaphor for many peoples, including the Bodos. Therefore, I consider saori to be

the root metaphor of the Bodos. I will employ this concept of saori or community as a “Live Community” metaphor in the integrative model of Christian religious education in Chapter Five.

C. Solidarity and Reciprocity

The third pedagogical dimension of saori is *solidarity* and *reciprocity* within the community and beyond, which provides a sense of belongingness and peoplehood. In the Bodo community, mutual help through saori, says Endle, is “worthy of high commendation and healthy support.”²⁶⁰ There is a spirit of spontaneity to saori, and it generates a sense of cultural identity and belongingness, which binds people together. In regards to solidarity among the Bodo community, Endle makes two telling observations about the Bodos. He mentions in the *The Kacharis*, how in one instance a whole village paid a fine imposed upon an individual worker by a tea factory, and on another occasion, a whole group of Bodo laborers left their job in tea factory for a wrong done to one of their employees.²⁶¹ This is how they expressed their solidarity. People internalize ideas of solidarity, mutual help, care, and reciprocity through the acts and ethos of saori. But in the present day context, to a large extent such gestures are becoming less common.

Such solidarity finds cross-cultural analogies. Asesela D. Ravuvu, in his work *The Fijian Ethos*, schematizes how, among the people of Lutu, Matainasau, and Lasevelu in Fiji, the reciprocation of any gift or service promoted solidarity, while non-reciprocity promoted a negative relationship.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ Endle, *Kacharis*, 13.

²⁶¹ Endle, *Kacharis*, 1-2. Endle worked in my area as a SPG missionary for forty years.

²⁶² Asesela D. Ravuvu, *The Fijian Ethos*, (Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific, 1987), 249-253.

Reciprocation – recognition, respect and appreciation – strengthening of the bond – incorporation and unity – continuity = Positive relationship.
 Non-reciprocation – non-recognition, lack of respect and appreciation – weakening and breaking of the bonds – separation and disunity – discontinuity = Negative relationship.²⁶³

Despite their geographical separation, these groups all share notions of solidarity. The exchange of gifts or services between families and parties in a reciprocal manner and the expression of solidarity through such acts are recognized by almost all peoples, being local instances of something seemingly universal, what Reynolds calls “localized universality.”²⁶⁴ For the Bodos, solidarity and reciprocity are both agnatically (relatives descended from same man/father) and non-agnatically (relatives descended from same woman/mother) related. Mutual help and reciprocation of services through saori fosters mutual respect and creates bonds, and consequently strengthens links that facilitate solidarity and co-operation. And while the reciprocal exchange of services in familial saoris is heterogeneous and expected but not absolutely obligatory, corporate saoris engender solidarity beyond family and ethnic boundaries, transcending cultural differences. In each, however, relationships are revitalized through the responsibilities of reciprocity and mutual help.

Based on my personal experience with almost all known saoris, both corporate and familial, there is no doubt in my mind that Bodos learn the ethos of mutual help, solidarity, reciprocity, and care for one another through saori. I will describe how this pedagogical dimension of solidarity and reciprocity can be extended to hybridic/global

²⁶³ Ravuvu, *The Fijian*, 249-253.

²⁶⁴ Thomas E. Reynolds, *The Broken Whole: Philosophical Steps Toward a Theology of Global Solidarity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), see Chapter Three.

solidarity through hospitality in Chapter Six.

D. Justice

The fourth pedagogical dimension that we can derive from saori is a sense of justice.

Exchange of service through reciprocity in saori entails the sense of *justice* and *fairness* among the Bodos. Particularly the familial saoris are always reciprocal and the load and amount of service are equally distributed among the families and participants.

E. Preferential Option

The fifth pedagogical dimension that we can derive from saori is *preferential option* to the orphan and widow. While the saoris discussed so far are reciprocal in nature, this is not always the case. For groups such as widows and orphans, saoris are undertaken without the expectation of an exchange of services. For them there is no reciprocity. Here, the notion of *preferential option* to the poor, impoverished and incapable is well exemplified for widows and orphans in saori. These people can find solace through saori.

F. Experiential Learning

The sixth pedagogical dimension of saori is learning through action or *experiential learning*. In saori, learning takes place through participation and action. There is no detached subject-object relationship, but rather an embodied experience. Among the Bodos nobody is taught abstractly what saori is; instead, everybody learns by participating in it. For the Bodos, an abstract definition of saori is generally not a concern. Saori is action by the community, in the community, and for the community. It

fosters a spirit of mutual care and support, and instills a shared sense of confidence and security. Saori is both a method and a process of learning. There is no separate training in saori; people learn as they work through action (saori) and reflection (saorai).

This can be called learning through action or, following David A. Kolb, experiential learning.²⁶⁵ Kolb developed his theory of experiential learning based on the foundational works of John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget. This theory is well exemplified by the Bodos, who learn experientially in and through the participation of saori. However, while Kolb's theory takes for granted and emphasizes Western individualism, saori emphasizes the community. I will apply the notion of experiential learning as one of the methods for an integrative model of Christian religious education in Chapter Five. It also must be admitted that any pedagogy derived from experience can always be criticized as being romantic, moralist, and anti-intellectualist. We will look at all these criticisms in detail in Chapter Five.

G. Conversation/Dialogue

The seventh pedagogical dimension of saori derives from its conversational character. Saori is always associated with saorai, which means shared discussion, deliberation or reflection in Bodo. Saorai also means conversation or dialogue. Saori and saorai are, in fact, mutually inclusive and cannot be taken separately. Action and reflection are intertwined in shared momentum of ongoing dialogue. I will discuss in depth the etymological meanings and relationship between saori and saorai in Chapter Five and then conversation/dialogue Chapter Six.

²⁶⁵ David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1984), 1-38. See also John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (London: Colin Books, 1938).

H. Humility

Finally, the summoning and reciprocity of saori bespeaks the notion of *humility*. It demonstrates that individuals or families are in need of one another for working, living and learning together in solidarity. We are interdependent in terms of living, doing and learning. No family or a community is complete on its own. A sense of mutual dependence and humility characterizes saori, which I will apply in the analyses of the sixth chapter.

V. Limitations of Saorian Concept

Despite all its pedagogical potentialities, there are limitations in the concept of saori. Comaroff and Comaroff contend that the Marxists have long criticized traditional anthropological conceptions of culture “for overstressing the implicit, systematic and consensual, for treating symbols and meanings of cultures as if they were neutral and above history and for ignoring their overpowering and authoritative dimensions.”²⁶⁶ The symbols and meanings of a culture are not innocent, and therefore any uncritical acceptance and use of them is detrimental to the very purpose for which they are intended.

Endle comments that the Bodo community is a community with an “intensely clannish”²⁶⁷ character. Therefore, when we consider saori to be the epicenter of Bodo culture we must look at the limitations of its symbolic and metaphoric meanings and functions as well. Admittedly, Bodo society is very closely knit society; however, it is not generally a clan-based society, but, rather, an ethnicity-based society. For example, in

²⁶⁶ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation*, 20.

²⁶⁷ Endle, *Kacharis*, 2.

Bodo society a Basumatary family may not necessarily maintain a close relationship with another Basumatary family, nor a Daimary family with another. Clan is not the source of the mutual helping, reciprocity, and solidarity of saori. It is the whole ethnic consciousness that plays a role in Bodo society. Allegiance and loyalty to one's own ethnic group is a characteristic feature of the members of almost all the tribes in northeast India. Endle, however, did not consider this characteristic to be a weakness for the Bodos. Unfortunately, the practice of saori among the Bodos is basically confined to the context of a specific village and/or ethnic groups. Some saoris, such as the construction of an embankment, road, or canal might involve more than one village and/or ethnic group but still be confined within a particular geographical area. Familial saoris, despite the name, also must move beyond family ties and the boundaries of a village. We can point out the following limitations.

First, the function of saori is generally highly localized. Consequently, solidarity in saori is *localized solidarity*. Given the above-mentioned points about family ties, the solidarity and reciprocity generated through the concept and practice of saori is constrained by limitations. It is thus situated within a particular place and community (or communities) within a boundary of "we" and "us." At times it is generated purely by urgent local agricultural and social needs rather than by general concern for one another, though this can still serve to bring people together. If a community's sense of welfare is confined within its boundaries, a sense of parochialism and insularity comes to pervade it, fostering inward looking tendencies. If the practice of saori remains confined within a particular community there is a danger of ghettoization.

Herein lies a key task for Christian religious educators: to be agents that can

enable concepts of “localized solidarity and reciprocity” to transcend ethnic boundaries, localities, and communities of particular tribes and evolve into what Reynolds calls “hybridized or globalized solidarity”²⁶⁸—that is, shifting away from “we” and “us” over and against “they” and “them” and moving toward a larger sense of solidarity among all. I will discuss how this might be accomplished in Chapter Six, when I address themes of hospitality, dialogue, humility, and justice.

Second, in some of the activities in certain saoris there is strict gender segregation. For example, plowing being done by a woman is unthinkable and culturally prohibited. It is the men who bear that responsibility. Ironically, though, if there is drought, there is a belief that rain will come if a woman does the plowing. Therefore, while it is generally considered unnatural, in some cases women’s involvement in tasks assigned to men is considered to have supernatural power.

It is important to note that this gender segregation is purely in the context of specific saoris and does not necessarily apply to overall status in the society. Indeed, Bodo society as a whole is patriarchal in nature. But Endle observes that, although, the status of women among the Bodos is not at par with their sisters in Khasi Hills (now Meghalaya), who have matriarchal type of society, it is much higher than in other Indian cultures.²⁶⁹ Historians opine that Bodos, at some point in their history, were perhaps socially matriarchal, just like their sister tribes, the Garos, Khasis, and Jaintias of Meghalaya; however, due to Sanskritization and living in close proximity to their Hindu neighbors they gradually became a patriarchal society. Even today matriarchy is still the norm among their sibling tribes in Meghalaya. Keeping the limitations of saori in mind,

²⁶⁸ Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, 95-100.

²⁶⁹ Endle, *Kacharis*, 22.

the next section discusses some of the theoretical implication of saori for education.

VI. Theoretical Implications of Saori in Education

My endeavor to form a Christian religious education theory out of the concept and practice of saori falls under the umbrella of cultural studies (a part of postcolonial studies), seeking to establish a relationship between culture and education. Because of this, it is instructive to begin by discussing the pedagogical dimensions of saori in light of Lawrence Grossberg's observations on the relationship between culture and education. Grossberg notes that the relationship between culture and education has recently become a topic of interest. The "Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies" (CCCS) in the U.K. and then U.S.A. was the locus for this interest, spearheaded by the founding figures of cultural studies: Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, E. P. Thomson, and Stuart Hall.²⁷⁰ Grossberg points out that while this study is very promising, there has been a limited impact on education until recently.²⁷¹ However, it has still provoked a wide range of questions and even raised troubling speculations in the field of education.²⁷²

In speaking the role of culture in education, the aim is not to equate the two. My goal is to accentuate and maximize education in a particular context and culture via the symbols, idioms, and language of that culture. My attempt to derive pedagogical insights from saori encourages a shift from pedagogy of culture to the culture of pedagogy of a given community.²⁷³ Cultural studies helps to consider the

²⁷⁰ Grossberg, "Introduction," 2-3.

²⁷¹ Grossberg, "Introduction," 2-3.

²⁷² Grossberg, "Introduction," 10.

²⁷³ Grossberg, "Introduction," 16.

pedagogy of cultural practices and not only pedagogy as a cultural practice.²⁷⁴ My emphasis here is how teaching and learning can take place within the context of a particular community but also can move beyond it, specifically in the case of saori

Grossberg observes that the main feature of cultural studies in relation to education is its radical contextualism, which has far reaching implications when it comes to the theorization of education.²⁷⁵ Grossberg observes five limitations of this relationship, which will provide the backdrop for further discussion in future chapters.

First, in cultural studies educational theory derived out of cultural practices is seen as a contextual intervention. Generally, it is driven by a specific socio-historical and political context and agenda, rejecting the application of theories assumed in advance of dealing with empirical data, which are not derived from the context. Any educational theory drawn out of cultural studies is always a response to a particular context. But according to Grossberg, such theories thereby become so localized that they cannot play a liberatory praxis in a global context.²⁷⁶ Educational theory drawn out of saori would be contextual, and, accordingly, pedagogy drawn out of such approaches would be a contextual intervention. However, disagreeing with Grossberg, I must say that contextualism does not entail being indifferent to the application of outside theories known in advance. When it comes to education, it only rejects the so-called “established theories,” which tend to be homogenizing and totalizing. That said, my argument is that despite its contextual radicalism, educational theory drawn out of cultural studies can still play a liberative praxis in a global context, which we will discuss in the fifth and sixth chapters.

²⁷⁴ Grossberg, “Introduction,” 16.

²⁷⁵ Grossberg, “Introduction,” 5-6.

²⁷⁶ Grossberg, “Introduction,” 5-6.

Second, one of the objectives of cultural studies and postcolonial studies is to interrogate the relationships between culture/knowledge and power. This interrogation between power and knowledge depends upon a particular site or context into which the study seeks to intervene.²⁷⁷ Critics of cultural studies contend that cultural studies cannot intervene constructively because it only reproduces conflictive symbolic representation of power, on the one hand discovering what we already know (that there are differences) and on the other fashioning more representation of identities, differences and inequalities, which leads to further fragmentation and conflict.²⁷⁸ Therefore, it is argued that cultural studies cannot be identified as a critical tool. In Grossberg's analysis, it remains content with the cracks found in the process of reproduction and representation and does not address how resistance, particularly among the subalterns, may prove to be false and unjust. Therefore, such lacuna nullifies the optimism of cultural studies.²⁷⁹ Even so, I argue that just because it produces more representation of identities, differences and inequalities, does not necessarily mean that it cannot function as a critical tool. I will argue that it can function as a liberative praxis in the Chapters Five and Six.

The third limitation Grossberg points out is what we have discussed in the first section of this chapter, namely, that the concept of culture is contextual or polysemic and (and I might add) multivocal. As such, a culture or community is caught between every day life, social formation and representational practices. It is caught between semantics (maps of meaning) and a whole way of life.²⁸⁰ In this connection, I further examine what Grossberg finds ironic, the debates between Manthia Diawara and Ellen Rooney. Critics

²⁷⁷ Grossberg, "Introduction," 6.

²⁷⁸ Grossberg, "Introduction," 6.

²⁷⁹ Grossberg, "Introduction," 6.

²⁸⁰ Grossberg, "Introduction," 7.

who side with Diawara argue that a cultural study in one of its strains is always marked by a propensity to reduce knowledge of cultural studies or a culture to mere textuality.²⁸¹ However, those who support Rooney argue that the resistance to textuality or discourse means an effort to maintain a space for political action outside the text by depoliticizing discourse. Grossberg agrees that cultural studies should not reduce culture or the politics of culture to questions of mere textuality. But based on feminist poststructuralism, he disagrees with Rooney's argument that cultural studies should depoliticize discourse. Grossberg contends that an attitude of mere textuality/discourse shun political propensity has led to the rejection of critical practice as a hermeneutics or interpretative act of theoretical self-reflection. For Grossberg, cultural studies assumes that a reality is constantly reworked by cultural practices and reality is made available only through cultural practices. So, echoing Hebdige, Grossberg contends that if critical practice becomes only a witness, rather than a critical tool, the end result is that "cultural studies becomes not only the sites and stakes of struggle, but also weapons as well," not only representing power, but reproducing and deploying it uncritically as well.²⁸²

The implications of this argument with regards to saori as a part of cultural studies in inculturation of education means that we take seriously the concept and practice of various Bodo saoris as contextual and polysemic. This means the semiotics (symbols, representational practices) and semantics (maps of meanings) of saoris can be contested, and they are flexible and fluid. Further, here emerge the questions of how to reconcile the dialectical tension between the text (discourse) and the context (site, location, politics) and how to present textuality as a critical tool for theoretical and hermeneutical

²⁸¹ Grossberg, "Introduction," 7.

²⁸² Grossberg, "Introduction," 7.

reflections without becoming hegemonic. Such questions are important for me and I will address them in Chapter Five.

The fourth theoretical limitation Grossberg points out is that in cultural studies, the cultural practice/text/event itself is contextual and therefore, its effects are also contextual.²⁸³ Because of this, cultural studies cannot function as a liberative praxis at a global level. A cultural practice functions in complex and conflicting ways, as it is the site of complex representational intersections and therefore not simply a microcosmic representation of a culture/community that can be applied elsewhere. Cultural practices are better seen as a working of multiple forces (both causes and effects) that intersect in different power structures, where different things can and do happen with multiple possibilities. Here arise the questions of the role of agency and liberation in the context of different power structures. Are human beings merely the product of cultural processes, such that agency is radically contextual and issues of liberation are confined to contextual understanding? I will explore these concerns in Chapter Three.

Finally, Grossberg points out that in cultural studies “the politics—its sites, goals, and forms of struggle—is [also] contextually defined,”²⁸⁴ so it is culture specific and particular. This is in keeping with its tendency to consider specificity rather than universality when it comes to the question of practices. However, I argue that beneath every understanding of particularity there lies an understanding of universality, and vice-versa. Problems arise when we look at these in binary opposition.

These theoretical limitations pointed out by Grossberg, many of which overlap in their implications, provide a framework for much of what will be discussed subsequently

²⁸³ Grossberg, “Introduction,” 8.

²⁸⁴ Grossberg, “Introduction,” 6-8.

in this project.

Conclusion: Summary Reflections

In conclusion, we can say that when we talk about saori as a part of cultural studies or postcolonial studies we must always remember that it is a contextual intervention, depending on a particular site, political context or location—in this case it is the Bodo context (Chapter One). Consequently, even the goal and objectives of such cultural study (e.g. on saori) tend to be confined within that particular (Bodo) context, site or location. The text/discourse that we produce out of the interrogation or investigation of the relations between culture and education—as well as knowledge and power—seem to be confined within that particular site, location and political context. Therefore, now the question is how and in what ways cultural studies (like that of saori, its textuality/discourse—its semiotics that is symbols of representational work and its semantics that is maps of meanings) can function as a critical tool for hermeneutical or interpretative practices and theoretical reflections without becoming a weapon of power that reproduces and deploys hegemony. In other words, how should we deal with the dialectical tension between the text and the context—that is, the textuality of saori (semiotics and semantics) and its political propensity (its sites, location and politics within the Bodo context)—in educational settings as a part of cultural studies? How do we move between the particular and the universal, local and global or from we/us to they/them versus to a broader horizon in theoretical reflections and educational practices? We have seen the limitations of saori as potentially an insular and parochial affair if it does not open beyond the community.

Therefore, there is a need to query further the concept of culture from postcolonial and postmodern perspectives in order to move out from localized solidarity to a global solidarity and reciprocity in saori. The current Bodo context calls for interventions that offer possibilities for novelty and variety in the future. The purpose of such endeavor is not nostalgic reminiscence, but progression towards a future that respects local identities but opens beyond them in a self-transcending solidarity of learning through hospitality and dialogue. This necessitates a theoretical framework with clear perspectives based on postcolonial theory, hermeneutics, and a postcolonial/postmodern understanding of culture, from which we can address these issues. The final conclusion of this study suggests that the solidarity and reciprocity of saori can be developed into hybridic solidarity for dwelling together in hospitality, dialogue, humility and justice. To build the case for such a vision, I shall begin in the next chapter by exploring postcolonial theory, biblical hermeneutics and the concept of culture as hybridic, contested, open, and unstable. Based on this, I shall then analyze the major theories of Christian religious education in the fourth chapter and develop an alternative model in the fifth and sixth chapters where I will apply the pedagogical potentialities of saori.

Chapter Three

Postcolonial Theory, Hermeneutics, and Culture: A Theoretical Framework for Subaltern Education

Philosophy thought that it had done with problem of origins. It was no longer a question of starting or finishing. The question was, what happens “in between”?²⁸⁵

Introduction

In the first chapter I discussed the Bodo context and the significance of history/narrative in subaltern epistemology, thereby establishing the background of this study. Then, in the second chapter, I discussed Bodo saori, the central element in their socio-economic and cultural life and the entelechy of Bodo pedagogy, which was explained as a communitarian mode of teaching/learning. I discussed saori through an understanding of culture as holistic/integrated/bounded, based on structuralist and modernist theories. We now need to look at culture as contested/open/unstable in postcolonial/postmodern and globalized contexts, which will be the work of this chapter. It is no longer possible for theology and Christian religious education to ignore postcolonial and postmodern sensibilities, because it is through cultural imperialism in Christian religious education that a colonial legacy continued among groups such as the Bodos.

Chapter Three stands as a bridge in between chapters one and two and the latter half of this study. I have addressed a few theoretical issues on the relations between narrative/history and education, and culture and education in the previous chapters. In

²⁸⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

this chapter I develop a theoretical framework based on postcolonial theory, postcolonial hermeneutics and postcolonial/postmodern understandings of culture. This chapter contains four sections. In the first section, I will discuss some key concepts of postcolonial theory to derive a theoretical framework for subaltern education, drawing on the works of Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha. Building on this, in a second section, I will provide postcolonial perspectives for subaltern education. In the third section, I will deal with the role of biblical hermeneutics in Christian religious education and suggest the intercultural hermeneutics for an integrative model of Christian religious education, drawing mainly on the works of R. S. Sugirtharajah, as the Bible is linked with theology and Christian religious education in the Bodo contexts. Then in the fourth and final section I will focus on culture from a postcolonial perspective, particularly in terms of communication in pedagogy. And in conclusion I will dialectically reconstruct the concept of culture. I will further draw out the theoretical implications of this chapter in subsequent chapters when I begin to critically analyze major Christian religious education theories and offer a new model.

Following the colonial tradition, in most cases, Christian religious education programs and theology in Indian contexts have been based around a tradition of “giving” and “receiving,” a tradition that continued in the dissemination of spiritual knowledge from the north to the south since the colonial era. This transfer of knowledge is often just a smokescreen for the perpetuation of colonial domination and exclusion, particularly in the Bodo context. Education, supposedly a liberating force, remains a vehicle for the perpetuation of social control. Ashcroft et al. explain that education “is perhaps the most insidious and in some ways the most cryptic form of colonialist survival, older systems

now passing, sometimes imperceptibly, into neo-colonialist configurations.”²⁸⁶ Education remains one of the most powerful tools for social control. Yet, paradoxically, when carried out from a postcolonial perspective it also offers one of the most fruitful routes for dismantling colonial authority.²⁸⁷ Therefore, I argue that to make Christian religious education a contextually relevant, effective and liberative praxis in an integrative way for the Bodo context, we need to develop a theoretical framework based on postcolonial theory, hermeneutics and postcolonial/postmodern understandings of culture.

I. Key Postcolonial Theoretical Concepts: Implications for Subaltern Education

Despite being characterized by its critics as jargon-ridden and very much centered on Third World issues, my argument is that postcolonialism has much to offer for the development of epistemological categories for subaltern Christian religious education such as the Bodos. In this section, I endeavor to investigate how postcolonial theory can help educators to look into the subtle links between power and knowledge that so-called Third World countries inherited from colonialism.

Work on postcolonialism has been variously termed: postcolonial study, postcolonial criticism, postcolonial discourse, and postcolonial theory, belying the lack of a single, unified approach. However, this does not mean that it is not useful. In this study these terms are used interchangeably. As I explore the applicability of postcolonial theoretical concepts to educational practices, I have chosen the term postcolonial theory. Yet, this study will place greater emphasis on the theorizing of postcolonial theoretical

²⁸⁶ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, & Helen Tiffin, eds., *The post-colonial studies reader* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 425.

²⁸⁷ Ashcroft et al., eds., *Post-colonial*, 427.

concepts for education rather than on the study of postcolonial theory per se.

Although different authors approach postcolonialism from different backgrounds and perspectives, there are certain common aspects of their work—namely, they all seek to investigate and expose the links between power and knowledge in the textual production of the West. While Said and Spivak treat postcoloniality as a reading strategy, Bhabha treats it as an ontological condition of being. Said's seminal work, *Orientalism*, with its magisterial mode of colonial analysis, can be considered foundational in the tradition of postcolonial theory. Peter Childs and Patrick Williams say that *Orientalism* provided the impetus for theoretical inquiry of colonial discourse analysis and postcolonial theory.²⁸⁸ Gilbert admits that it “is in the context of this institutional network of literary-critical practices—and the values which underwrote them—that the emergence of postcolonial theory, in the shape of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), needs to be situated.”²⁸⁹ Important subsequent texts include Franz Fanon's *National Consciousness*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's “Can the Subaltern Speak?” and her other works, and Homi K. Bhabha's “Signs Taken for Wonders” in his *The Location of Culture*.²⁹⁰ While Said bases his approach on the works of Michael Foucault and Antonio Gramsci, Spivak's work is influenced by Jacques Derrida's deconstructionism, with a focus on subalterneity and feminism. Bhabha's works mainly deal with cultural and political analysis and he is methodologically indebted to Freud, Lacan, and Fanon. Fanon's work

²⁸⁸ Peter Childs and Patrick Williams, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory* (London, New York: Prentice Hall, 1997), 97-98.

²⁸⁹ Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practice, Politics* (London, New York: Verso, 1997), 34.

²⁹⁰ Gregory Castle, “Introduction” in Castle, ed., *Postcolonial Discourses: An Anthology* (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2001), xiii.

in *Black Skin, White Mask* is based on Freudian psychoanalysis.²⁹¹

Of late, postcolonial theory has come under serious criticism within Western academic circles. Gilbert even questions whether an academic discipline under the banner of postcoloniality can ever be called a theory, and he contends that there is a growing number of attacks coming from outside the field and increasing dissension within.²⁹²

Gilbert, along with others, argues that postcolonial theory is “politically complicit with the dominant neo-colonial regimes of knowledge” of the West.²⁹³ He argues “that the institutional location of postcolonial theory in the Western academy necessarily and automatically precludes it from being able to perform radical and liberatory kinds of cultural analysis.”²⁹⁴ For Gilbert, it is the intrusion of French “high” theory—notably, of Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and Michael Foucault—which generated the most critical debates, provoking extremes of approval and disapproval.²⁹⁵ Anne McClintock argues that if “‘post-colonial’ *theory* has sought to challenge the grand march of Western historicism and its entourage of binaries (self-other, metropolis-colony, center-periphery, etc.), the *term* ‘post-colonialism’ nonetheless reorients the globe once more around a single binary opposition: colonial-post-colonial.”²⁹⁶ Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge claim that postcolonialism is reduced to “purely textual phenomenon” and object that power and its effects are seen only within the context of discourse. Further, they see it as being

²⁹¹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

²⁹² Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*, Preface, i.

²⁹³ Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*, 3.

²⁹⁴ Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*, 3.

²⁹⁵ Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*, 1.

²⁹⁶ Anne McClintock “The Angel of Progress” in Patrick Williams and Chrisman Laura, eds., *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 292.

complicit with neocolonialism and thus call it “complicit postcolonialism.”²⁹⁷ Benita Parry, on the other hand, argues that its practicality has yet to be discovered in Western academic circles and that the construction of oppositional discourse has yet to take place.²⁹⁸ Amidst dissenting views or positions, postcolonial authors agree that postcolonial study/discourse/criticism is not “a single, invading monolith [in academic practices] but encompasses a wide range of critical practices and theoretical affiliations”²⁹⁹ But echoing Barbara Christian, it can be argued that theory need not be understood in the same way it is understood in the West and non-West or even in dominant and subordinate constituencies within the West.³⁰⁰ Christian further argues that Third World academics have always theorized, but “in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic.”³⁰¹ The Third World Scholars have developed theories in narrative forms, in the stories they create, in riddles and proverbs they have in their repertoire, and in playing with language, since such theorization is more dynamic.³⁰²

It is beyond the scope of this study to examine the applicability of all the theoretical and conceptual categories of postcolonial theory. It will have to be sufficient to say that I am considering the following categories valuable for the analysis of the epistemological categories of Christian religious education in the Bodo context, keeping in mind the subalterneity of the Bodos. It is hoped that the postcolonial theoretical

²⁹⁷ Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge, “What is Post(-)Colonialism?” in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, eds., *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 276-290.

²⁹⁸ Benita Parry, “Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse” in Bill Ashcroft et al., eds., *The post-colonial studies reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), 36-44.

²⁹⁹ Vilashini Coopan, “W(h)ither Post-colonial Studies? Towards the Transnational Study of Race and Nation” in Laura Chrisman and Benita Parry, eds., *Postcolonial Theory and Criticism* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), 1-35.

³⁰⁰ Barbara Christian, “The Race for Theory” in Bill Ashcroft et al., eds., *Post-colonial*, 457-460.

³⁰¹ Christian, “Race,” 457.

³⁰² Christian, “Race,” 457.

categories discussed in the following sections—the relationship between power and knowledge, subject constitution/formation and constitution of subaltern agency, cultural hybridity and cultural difference, and interstice or third space, some of which postcolonial thinkers generally do not treat distinctly—will assist in my analyses of the major theories of Christian religious education in the fourth chapter and will help in the development of an alternative model of Christian religious education theory.

A. Subalterneity and the Relationship Between Power and Knowledge

One of the key contributions of postcolonial theory to Christian religious education is Said's idea regarding the relationship between power and knowledge.³⁰³ Despite many critics highlighting the ambiguity of Said's use of Foucauldian post-structural theory (drawing particularly on *The Archeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish*),³⁰⁴ this has enabled him to investigate the production and dissemination of knowledge through imperial power. His approach sought to understand the Western descriptions and analyses of Eastern cultures as they were moderated by “the politics, the consideration, the positions, and the strategies of power”³⁰⁵ of western empires and, in turn, showed how power and knowledge intersected in the production of epistemological discourses. Said's theories, along with those of other postcolonialists, aimed at exposing the intricate “relationship between Western representation and knowledge on the one hand, and

³⁰³ Edward E. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Book, 1979).

³⁰⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, 3. Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 1969 trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London, New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the birth of prison*, 1975, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

³⁰⁵ Edward Said, “Orientalism Reconsidered” in Barker et al., eds., *Europe and Its Others: Proceedings of the Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature*, July, vol. 1 (Colchester: University of Essex, 1984), 15.

Western material and political power on the other.”³⁰⁶ They also highlighted “the political and material effects of Western scholarship and academic institutions, and their affiliations to the world outside them.”³⁰⁷

Such an approach generally rejects “the traditional liberal understanding of the humanities” of the West “as organized round the pursuit of ‘pure’ or ‘disinterested’ knowledge”³⁰⁸ but rather views such “practices as deeply implicated in the operation and technologies of power, by virtue of the fact that all scholars [and artists] are subject to particular historical and institutional affiliations which are governed in the last by the dominant ideology and political imperatives of the society in question.”³⁰⁹ Therefore, according to Said, “ideas, cultures and histories cannot seriously be studied without their force, or more precisely their configurations of power, also being studied.”³¹⁰ In advancing these arguments Said tries to synthesize Foucault’s thoughts with the works of Gramsci,³¹¹ though some critics argue that it is more a “yoking together by violence.”³¹²

With regards to the conception of power and how it operates, Said follows Foucault in two principal ways, albeit with differences. First, in *The History of Sexuality* (1976), Foucault argues that in the post-Enlightenment West power does not operate in simple forms such as repression or judicial sanction, nor is it something that percolates downward from institutions like royalty or the state.³¹³ Instead, he sees power as an impersonal force operating through multiple sites and channels, constructing what he

³⁰⁶ Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*, 34.

³⁰⁷ Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*, 36.

³⁰⁸ Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*, 36.

³⁰⁹ Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*, 36.

³¹⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 5.

³¹¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

³¹² Patrick Williams and Chrisman Laura, “Introduction” in Williams and Laura, eds., *Colonial Discourse*, 6.

³¹³ Michael Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, vol. 1 trans. Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 10.

calls pastoral regime, operating through an anonymous network of relations, seeking to maximize itself by all means possible. This pastoral regime seeks to control its subjects and make them conform to their social system as objects of power by (re)forming them. This notion of power thus renders governments, individuals, and writers as agents rather than authors in its operation.³¹⁴ But for Said, power and its “domination of the non-Western world is not an arbitrary phenomenon but a conscious and purposive process governed by the will and intention of individuals as well as institutional imperatives.”³¹⁵ Said’s conception is that an individual has the “capacity to evade the constraints of both the dominant power and its normative ‘archive’ of cultural representation.”³¹⁶ The key instrument of power in all these domains is knowledge, insofar as the subjects of power are first identified as such, whether deviant or not, and consequently made available for (re)forming. Furthermore, following Foucault, Said argues that the discourse of an episteme or a text, the medium in which power is constituted and through which it is exercised, constructs the objects of its knowledge and, as Foucault put it in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), “produces reality; it produces domains of objects and ritual truth.”³¹⁷ In other words, the link between power and knowledge is reflected in the constructed discourses of colonial texts, where objects of knowledge (colonial subjects) were constructed as “other.”

These theories regarding the relationship between power and knowledge have far reaching implications for Bodos (an “other”) in India, including in the arenas of Christian theology and education, as missionary educational enterprises were common during

³¹⁴ Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*, 36-37.

³¹⁵ Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*, 37.

³¹⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, 23.

³¹⁷ Foucault, *Discipline*, 194.

colonial period. During the missionary era and its civilizing mission, power and knowledge were intersected through human agency or agentic modes (colonial rulers and missionaries) and still function in non-agentic modes in certain churches. In the realm of Christian religious education and theology, spiritual knowledge, constructed and produced in the missionaries' home churches and theological institutions, was disseminated in the mission fields without any critical reflection on their own historical, ideological, political, or cultural contexts and with total neglect of the indigenous cultural and pedagogical practices, which were highly developed in certain cases. The result was gross "epistemic violence."³¹⁸ In this sub-section, I have explained the notion of relation between power and knowledge. I will investigate the way the notion of power and knowledge was linked in Christian religious education in the Bodo churches in the first section of the fourth chapter. In what follows, I discuss the subaltern subject formation/constitution and subaltern agency, which is one of the key points in this study.

B. Subject Constitution, Subaltern Agency, and Subaltern Education

1. Subject Constitution

Spivak's main contribution to postcolonial theory as it relates to subaltern education concerns the formation of the subject-constitution/subject-position of subalterns through a shift from a position of being "written about" to being "authors and readers" of their own narratives. The deconstruction of historiography is one of the ways by which this constitution/formation of subject-position is accomplished. Despite her critical attitude towards Derrida's deconstructionism, Spivak discusses it in relation to postcolonial issues

³¹⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Rani of Sirmur" in Francis Baker et al., eds., *Europe and Its Others: Proceedings of the Essex Conference*, July, vol. 1 (Colchester: University of Essex, 1985), 130.

in two ways. On the one hand she critiques it as “negative science” that does not produce “positive knowledge” and thus fails to establish “authoritative truth” regarding the text or problem in question, failing also to function as a form of “ideology-critique” or “exposure of error.”³¹⁹ On the other hand, in “The Rani of Sirmur,” she defends it as an “affirmative mode.”³²⁰ Such affirmation exists even though deconstruction by itself can never provide any program of resistance and liberation—be it socio-economic-political, ideological and pedagogical—because it “does not wish to officiate at the grounding of societies, but rather to be the gadfly.”³²¹ Yet, she argues, it has the potential to be politically enabling in three ways: (1) it has the potential to generate a greater awareness of possible help in the liberation or coming to voice of the excluded and marginalized social constituencies;³²² (2) it can be used “to subvert the system of binaries on which dominant discourses characteristically rely to legitimize their power”³²³; and (3) it can potentially provide political safeguard by preventing radical political programs, cultural analysis, and reproduction of values and assumptions that threaten to undermine subaltern subjectivity.³²⁴

Spivak invites us to be mindful that subaltern subject-position formation does not produce mere counter-hegemony through repetition-in-rupture. Counter hegemony is merely a perpetuation or repetition of binary oppositionality between the dominant and subordinate discourses, where for example postcolonialism may favor valorizing East (periphery, margin, other) over West (center, dominant, self) as a means of

³¹⁹ Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, eds., *The Spivak Reader* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 6.

³²⁰ Spivak, “Rani,” 128-151.

³²¹ Spivak, “Rani,” 147.

³²² Spivak, “Rani,” 128-151, see also Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*, 83-84.

³²³ Spivak, “Rani,” 128-151.

³²⁴ Landry and MacLean, *The Spivak Reader*, 6; see also Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic*, ed., Sarah Harasym (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 104.

countermanding hierarchies and domination. Rather, subalterns should take a position of negotiation, dialogue and critique (which involves self-reflexivity) in order to best allow for development and growth. In the formation of a subaltern subject-position there always comes questions of identity and the role of the investigating subject. The tendency in postcolonial theory is to align with traditional understandings of identity, belonging, and origin. But, following Lacan, Spivak suggests a decentered subject or self, which is not innate or given, but constructed discursively, a dispersed subject, following Derrida, or a multiplicity of subject-positions in tune with Foucault. When it comes to the question of textuality/discourse, that is “where the self loses its boundaries” and this “trace of the other in the self” prevents one’s identity and consciousness from becoming fully self-present in the text/discourse.³²⁵ In other words, the aim of subaltern subject-position formation is not to become fully self-present with an identity and consciousness (in text, history, and discourse) as a means of counter-hegemony (which only internalize and repeats colonial binaries), but rather is to pursue negotiation and critique beyond binary oppositions. And, this is the position I uphold in this study.

It is correct that subject or self is not innate or given, but instead is discursively constructed: however, I contend that a dispersion of the subject will only lead to centre-less constructions that lack a liberative force. Therefore, while agreeing with much of Spivak’s analysis, I would argue for a discursive construction of subject or self as “polycentric-subject” in dialectical tension between self and other. The decentering of self always occurs in the relational context of others. And deconstruction always implies a kind of reconstruction. Therefore, for subalterns, such decentering necessarily leads to

³²⁵ Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*, 83-90. See also in G. C. Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 395-409.

polycentric subject-positions rather than a centre-less subjects. Yet, with polycentric subject-position formation we need to be wary lapsing into notions of pure or original forms of subaltern consciousness and identity often sought out both by uncritical subaltern and by non-subaltern enthusiasts, who are ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and ideological ‘root’ seekers and wish to retrieve to so called ‘pure’ ethno-cultural identities for epistemological leverage.³²⁶ I agree with Spivak on the issue of root seekers, be it linguistic, ethno-cultural and ideological; but I wish to push further by suggesting that there is no intrinsic harm in seeking roots or cultural origins, as problems arise only when we homogenize and totalize the epistemological categories derived from those cultural roots, which lead to self-closure and the denial or exclusion of other epistemological positions.

However, subalterns’ polycentric subject positions may seek cultural roots or cultural origins or even a “root metaphor” like that of saori, as in the case of the Bodos discussed in the second chapter. Yet it is for their subject-constitution and collective agency and not for essentialization and totalization in order to assimilate and dominate “others.” This is where the affirmation of organizing principles of saori as a “root metaphor” in epistemology within the polycentric subject position of the Bodos can be accommodated without essentializing and totalizing tendencies.

The concept of a polycentric subaltern subject-position radically challenges traditional understandings of education in three key ways: (1) it enables an investigation of subaltern historical actors; (2) following deconstructionism, it enables a focus on the absences of silenced voices/narratives rather than the presences of dominant voices/narratives in the discourses, texts, histories, and archives of the mainstream

³²⁶ Spivak, *Critique*, 395-409. See also Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*, 86.

academy; and (3) it allows learners, as opposed to just facilitators/teachers, to be viewed as subject or actors. When we discuss the category of learner/student, I will elaborate on this point more from the works of Freire in Chapter Five.³²⁷ In Christian religious education all these interlocking factors allow for the opening up of oneself, in conversation with others as pilgrims together in the journey of life.

2. Inscription of Subaltern Agency

Closely related to the notion of subaltern subject-formation is the notion of inscription or re-inscription of subaltern agency, another aspect of postcolonial theory that has revolutionized educational concepts and practices. Subaltern subject-formation and the inscription of subaltern agency have both literary and political underpinnings, and postcolonial writers generally do not strictly differentiate these two concepts. The difference between the two is that subject-formation is related more closely to text/discourses (literary, Spivak), while agency formation is related more to ontology and action (doing, practices, Bhabha). These differences should not be exaggerated, though, for the concepts are closely connected and both have socio-economic, political and literary underpinnings.

It is Spivak and Bhabha who developed the concept of subaltern agency in postcolonial discourse, with Bhabha drawing on the works of Said and Fanon.³²⁸ While Said portrays the subaltern as a silent interlocutor and an effect or product of dominant discourse/ideology, with no agency to operate oppositionally, in *The Wretched of the*

³²⁷ I will discuss more on the teacher/facilitator-student/learner relations from the works of Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in the fifth chapter.

³²⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2008 print (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 245-282.

Earth, Fanon portrays the subaltern as a violent native insurgent³²⁹ similar to the figure described by the *Subaltern Studies* group. Bill Ashcroft et al. define agency as “the ability of the postcolonial subjects to initiate action in engaging or resisting imperial power.”³³⁰

Some critics argue that post-colonial concepts of agency are made problematic due to their roots in post-structuralist theories of subjectivity. Based on these theories, human subjectivity is understood as constructed variously within the parameters of ideology (Althusser), language (Lacan), or discourse (Foucault). This means that any action performed by a subject must also be a consequence of those things (ideology, language or discourse).³³¹ The problem is that all three are inherited from dominant groups, undermining agency in subaltern experience. However, postcolonial theorists claim that as the importance of political action is paramount, in negotiation and resistance the question of agency is taken for granted. They argue that although it may be difficult for the subaltern to escape the effects of the forces that construct them, it is not impossible. The very recognition of forces of domination and subordination itself is an act of resistance.

Thus, in epistemology, agency refers to the ability of subaltern or marginalized groups to engage with or resist domination and subordination by the dominant culture or ideology, and this implies the perspective of a subject-position. However, both Spivak and Bhabha maintain that the process of developing agency takes place through negotiation/dialogue and critique. For Bhabha, even subversion and transgression is

³²⁹ Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*, 130-131.

³³⁰ Ashcroft et al., eds., *The Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 8.

³³¹ Homi K. Bhabha, “The Third Space” Interview with Homi K. Bhabha in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 216.

negotiation and negotiation is not a form of selling out or compromise.³³² Agency is formed through a dialectical process, by both engagement and resistance through the processes of negotiation and dialogue, and cannot thus be understood purely as resistance or engagement. And this opens up issues of hybridity and differences.

C. Cultural Hybridity, Cultural Difference, and Subaltern Education

1. Cultural Hybridity

Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity³³³ is important for immigrant academics and cultural practitioners in the West, who face ontological or identity-related as well as pedagogical issues related to cultural hybridity. It is also relevant for theologians and Christian religious education educators in the Third World, who face issues of hybrid culture as a result of colonialism and cultural interaction with native cultures.

Bhabha says that cultural hybridity has emerged in moments of historical transformation, such as the aftermath of colonialism and as a result of forced and voluntary migrations to the West. Cultural hybridity is the result of an encounter between cultures that is both consensual and violent. In the border space in which these encounters take place, culture and power do not reside solely in a single tradition, though its recognition may provide a partial form of identification. Rather, colonial encounters create double, multiple, and hyphenated identities.

Colonialism wrought massive cultural changes for both the colonizers and the colonized.³³⁴ The significance of cultural hybridity is that it recognizes cultural differences and, from an ontological perspective, it allows for the equal coexistence of

³³² Bhabha, "Third Space," 207-221.

³³³ Bhabha, *Location*, 2-12.

³³⁴ Bhabha, *Location*, 2-12.

these various identities, at least on an ideological level. Cultural hybridity is a product of both cultural convergence and divergence, signifying both the synchronistic and diachronistic dimensions of culture(s), or, in other words, sameness and difference.³³⁵ Thus postcolonial theorists take cultural hybridity as a positive, and hold the view that it provides a way out of binary thinking, allowing for the inscription of subaltern agency and even facilitating the restructuring and destabilizing of power relations.

However, not all theorists consider cultural hybridity to be a strictly positive thing. Theologian, Wonhee Anne Joh, in her work *Heart of the Cross*, outlines three conceptions about hybridity. First, she views it as the product of oppression, something that emerges out of coerced assimilation and deculturation and used as the basis of a strategy of containment and policing by the dominant power. As a result, displacement and disjunction lead to erasure and the disavowal of culture.

Second, she actually responds to the first conception by suggesting that hybridity functions to undermine authority and to displace the binary thinking on which power is based. Hence, in this framework hybridity disturbs, intervenes, unsettles, interrogates, ironizes, denaturalizes, and transgresses by refusing to fit into established categories.

Third, Joh suggests that hybridity is not an effect of inevitable political mixing but instead a “thick-description” of historical and geographical situations.³³⁶ Simply put, according to this argument political mixing between dominant and marginal cultures/ideologies cannot take place. In other words, cultural hybridity is not necessarily an effect or product of inevitable political mixing between dominant cultures/ideologies and those who are in the periphery (subalterns) but rather a thick description of cultural

³³⁵ Bhabha, *Location*, 2-12.

³³⁶ Wonhee Anne Joh, *The Heart of the Cross* (Louisville, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 53-55.

analyses based on particular historical and geographical situations of referenced power relations. This argument is in similar line to what Mishra and Hodge called “pure textual phenomenon,” as earlier referred.³³⁷ Further, it is the dialectical tension between postcolonial text/discourse (cultural analysis) production and the political propensity (site, location and politics) that we discussed in the second chapter as put forward by the critics of cultural studies in relation to culture and education.³³⁸ However, postcolonial theorists argue that in cultural hybridity, there is a mutual agency on all sides. In notions of cultural hybridity the question of dominant and marginal/periphery does not arise. Here, power flows in multiple directions. One of the salient characteristics of this conception of cultural hybridity, then, is ambiguity. Yet, this ambiguity is not necessarily a-political, for it is the source of power to subvert dominant discourses.³³⁹

Anjali Prabhu takes a further critical angle on hybridity. She argues that because the term hybridity was coined during the heightened colonial period, and functions as “a seductive idea,” central to the colonial enterprise, it is therefore “first and foremost a racial term.”³⁴⁰ Prabhu suggests that two particular questions need to be investigated in light of developments in postcolonial theory: (1) whether the colonial contexts that lead to “tensions between white people and people of color”³⁴¹ under which the term hybridity was conceived are still prevalent in the postcolonial world; and (2) whether there has been modification in the concept of hybridity that acknowledges “interactions between

³³⁷ Mishra and Hodge, “What is,” in Williams and Chrisman, eds., *Colonial Discourse*, 276-290. I have touched this point in the general critique of the postcolonialism.

³³⁸ Lawrence Grossberg, “Introduction: Bringin’ It All Back Home-Pedagogy and Cultural Studies” in Henry A. Giroux and Peter McLaren, eds., *Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies* (New York, London: Routledge, 1994), 1-28; especially see Grossberg’s third argument.

³³⁹ Joh, *Heart*, 53-55.

³⁴⁰ Anjali Prabhu, *Hybridity: Limits, Transformation, Prospects* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), Preface, xi-xii.

³⁴¹ Prabhu, *Hybridity*, xi-xii.

these two groups (also recognizable as ex-colonizer and ex-colonized)” in a post-colonial context.³⁴² According to Prabhu, the claims that hybridity provides a “way out of binary thinking” and “that it allows the inscription of subaltern agency, and even permits a restructuring and destabilizing of power” are rather suspect.³⁴³ She clearly distinguishes between hybridity as a theoretical concept and political stance, on the one hand, and hybridity as a social reality with historical specificity, on the other.³⁴⁴ On this basis, she suggests theories of hybridity that effectively balance the task of inscribing a functional-instrumental version of the relationship between culture and society with that of enabling more utopian/collective image of society.³⁴⁵ From Prabhu’s argument we can see that both cultural hybridity and local cultural specificities are social and historical realities. Tensions between these arise when one is privileged over the other.

Critics also point out that cultural hybridity “implies negating and neglecting the imbalance and inequality of the power relations it references.”³⁴⁶ Along this line, critics also argue that “by stressing the transformative cultural, linguistic, and political impacts on both the colonized and colonizer, it has been regarded as replicating assimilationist policies by masking or ‘whitewashing’ cultural differences.”³⁴⁷ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Benita Parry, and Aijaz Ahmad also stress the textualist and idealist basis of such cultural analysis and point to the fact that they neglect specific local cultural differences.³⁴⁸ Further, critics point out that the idea of hybridity underlies other cultural transactions such as syncretism, cultural synergy, and transculturation in an attempt to

³⁴² Prabhu, *Hybridity*, xi-xii.

³⁴³ Prabhu, *Hybridity*, 1.

³⁴⁴ Prabhu, *Hybridity*, 2.

³⁴⁵ Prabhu, *Hybridity*, 2.

³⁴⁶ Ashcroft et al., eds., *Post-colonial*, 119.

³⁴⁷ Ashcroft et al., eds., *Post-colonial*, 119.

³⁴⁸ Ashcroft et al., eds., *Post-colonial*, 119.

stress the mutuality of cultures in the colonial and post-colonial process. This criticism stems from the perception that theories that emphasize mutuality necessarily downplay oppositionality, and thus increase post-colonial dependence. There is, however, nothing in the idea of hybridity as such which suggests that mutuality negates the hierarchical nature of the imperial process or that it necessarily involves the idea of an equal exchange.³⁴⁹ Given that Christian religious education inevitably confronts issues of cultural hybridity and local specificities, it behooves us to consider the difficulties just mentioned. I will deal some of these in Chapter Five.

2. Cultural Difference

The concept of cultural difference is rooted in cultural hybridity. Bhabha develops the notion of cultural difference against the backdrop of the Western liberal tradition. However, it has much currency for the subalterns in India, where it is common to celebrate and boast of cultural diversity and multiculturalism. It is interesting to note that, while Spivak comes from the dominant Indian cultural group (Hindu) and Bhabha comes from a minority (Parsi), both locate themselves in a position of subalterneity in the Western cultural milieu and they (particularly Bhabha) realize the importance of cultural difference within the context of multiculturalism. Bhabha's version of cultural difference reflects the demands of Indian subalterns, particularly those of northeast India.

The notion of cultural difference goes beyond the realm of cultural diversity. Bhabha argues that cultural diversity, an idea born out of the Western liberal tradition, particularly anthropology and philosophical relativism is not good enough for pedagogical practices. Despite being the bedrock of multicultural education, it poses two

³⁴⁹ Ashcroft et al., eds., *Post-colonial*, 119.

problems. First, although there is always entertainment and encouragement of cultural diversity, there is also a corresponding containment of it by the host or dominant culture through unstated norms, which identifies the other cultures as acceptable only if they can be located within the dominant socio-cultural framework. The second problem Bhabha points out is that although multiculturalism is encouraged, racism, casteism, and classism are still rampant in various forms. Multiculturalism is grounded in a universalism that only “permits” cultural diversity, masking ethnocentric norms, values, and the interests of minorities.³⁵⁰

According to Bhabha, the national population of a multicultural nation is constructed from a wide range of groups, with different interests, cultural histories, postcolonial influences, and sexual orientations, producing multiple unequal, uneven, and even potentially antagonistic political identities. While there are autonomous individuals through whom causal social change might take place, generally it is through multiple individuals acting in historical moments that the public sphere/domain is constructed, “either positively or negatively, either in progressive or regressive ways, often conflictually, sometime even *incommensurably*.”³⁵¹ Bhabha contends that the liberal relativist perspective from which the affirmation of cultural diversity flows is inadequate for cultural practices because it does not generally recognize the universalist and normative stance, underlying its cultural and political judgments. However, Bhabha argues that the concept of difference, based on theoretical history in post-structural thinking and psychoanalysis, facilitates the exposure of the limitations of liberalism and relativism, the very potent mythologies of progress on which the West itself or Western

³⁵⁰ Bhabha, “Third Space,” 207-208.

³⁵¹ Bhabha, “Third Space,” 207-208.

culture is built. Further, Bhabha argues that the “position of liminality,” a space created in the process of the construction of cultural difference in the “spirit of alterity or otherness,” is the cutting edge where cultural practices for education can take place.³⁵² This is going to be one of the key principles, supporting my proposal for an integrative Christian religious education in Chapter Five.

The notion of cultural difference has two primary ramifications in India. Politically, in the Indian context, where the ideology of cultural diversity (with its associated aspirations towards encouragement and containment) prevails, the notion of cultural difference seems to provide greater opportunities to marginalized and subordinated groups. In educational settings the idea of cultural difference opens up doors for the recognition and appreciation of varied voices, methodologies, techniques, philosophical categories, and cultural practices. However, there is also the danger that over-privileging cultural difference might lead to a disorienting fragmentation from a lack of any shared political projects or cultural meanings, what Reynolds calls a “pluralism of dispersion” in which differences remain unconnected and diffuse.³⁵³ Therefore, in a field like Christian religious education, there has to be dialectical integration between sameness and difference, connection and separateness. While this will be addressed fully in Chapter Five, there are important implications in Bhabha’s notion of a third space of emancipation and beyond and its implication for subaltern education that merit consideration at this point.

³⁵² Bhabha, “Third Space,” 208-209.

³⁵³ Thomas E. Reynolds, *The Broken Whole: Philosophical Steps Toward A Theology of Global Solidarity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), 75.

D. Bhabha's Third Space of Emancipation and Beyond and Subaltern Education

According to Bhabha, the cultural confluence of humanity creates cultural hybridity, which takes place in a liminal, interstitial space, in-between the designations of identities, which Bhabha calls the “third space” of enunciation. According to Bhabha, cultural statements and systems are constructed in this space and colonizer and colonized are interdependent for the mutual construction of their subjectivities.³⁵⁴ The third space is always contradictory and ambivalent; and the cultural identities that emerge from it can make untenable the claim to a hierarchical purity of culture. While this third space is ambivalent in its construction of cultural identity, it helps us overcome the exotic appeal of cultural diversity and is useful for recognizing and empowering cultural difference through negotiation and dialogue.³⁵⁵ Third space, by virtue of being in the interstice position, constructs differences between cultures through negotiation and dialogue, opening up new possibilities for cultural hybridity. It is in constant flux.³⁵⁶

Leona M. English, in a seminal essay, crystallizes how the concept of third space offers different theoretical challenges in various fields of studies because of its political underpinnings and subversive intent.³⁵⁷ In postcolonial theory third space refers to the constructing and reconstructing of identities, to the fluidity of space.³⁵⁸ In cultural studies, third space is used to denote the place where negotiation takes place, where

³⁵⁴ Bhabha, *Location*, 28-56; see also Bhabha “The Third Space,” in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity*, 207-221.

³⁵⁵ Ashcroft et al., eds., *Post-colonial*, 118.

³⁵⁶ Bhabha, *Location*, 2-5.

³⁵⁷ Leona M. English, “Third-Space Practioners: Women Educating for Justice in the Global South” in *Adult Education Quarterly*, vol. 55, No. 2, February 2005, 85-100.

³⁵⁸ English, “Third-Space Practioners” 87-88. See also S. Khan, *Muslim women: Creating a North American Identity*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2000) and G. C. Spivak, “The Politics of Translation” in M. Barrett & A. Phillips, eds., *Destabilizing theory: Contemporary feminist debates*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 177-200; G. C. Spivak, *A critique on postcolonial reason: Towards the history of vanishing present* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

identity is constructed and reconstructed, and where life in all its ambiguity is played out. The notion of third space serves as a response to regulating, rigid views and suggests that identity is a complex, ambivalent, negotiable, and somewhat contested space where polarities do not apply.³⁵⁹ In the humanities, postcolonial writers such as Khan and Spivak have challenged mainstream epistemology by resisting colonialism, the rigidity in theory and practice, and the codification of theories with modernistic prescriptions. Feminist writers and theologians have used the notion of third space to bring attention to power structures, essentialism, and inequity surrounding gender and to probe hybridity, liminality, and interstices.³⁶⁰ This concept is also applied in theological education as a means of understanding intercultural communication. Employing Fumitaka Matsuoka, Schreiter proposes that whether in preaching or teaching, in an intercultural context the speaker and hearer or the teacher and learner do not come together from the two separate cultures. Rather, communication takes place in the interstitial space (third space) created out of the liminal experience of both interlocutors.³⁶¹ I will examine this theory's applicability to Christian religious education in terms of communication in intercultural context in Chapters Five. The next section builds upon what has been said thus far to offer postcolonial perspectives on education.

³⁵⁹ English, "Third-Space Practioners," 87. See also D. G. Gutierrez, "Migration, emergent ethnicity, and the "third space": The shifting politics of nationalism in greater Mexico," in *Journal of American History*, 1999, 86 (2), 481-517; K. Holinshed, "Tourism, hybridity, and ambiguity: The relevance of Bhabha's "third space" cultures, in *Journal of Leisure Research*, 1998, 30 (1), 121-156; E. W. Soja, *Third Space: Journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996).

³⁶⁰ See b. hook, *Feminist theory: From margin to the centre* (Boston MA: South End, 1984); S. Walter & L. Manicom, eds. 'Introduction' in *Gender in popular education: Methods for empowerment* (London: Zed Books, 1996), 1-22. The concept of third space is also used for methodological Research, see Fine, M. "Working the hyphens: Reinventing self and others in qualitative research" in N. Ninnes & S. Mehta, eds., *Handbook of qualitative research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), 70-82. It is also used for political writings, see H. Havel, *Disturbing the peace: A Conversation with K. Hvizdala*, trans. P. Wilson (New York: Knopf, 1990).

³⁶¹ Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 40-41.

II. Postcolonial Challenges and Perspectives for Subaltern Education

Robert J. C. Young outlines how postcolonial theory can offer direction and possibilities to intellectuals, educators, and even politicians in three ways as follows:

First, investigating the extent to which not only European history but also European culture and knowledge was part of, and instrumental in, the practice of colonization and its continuing aftermath. Second, identifying fully the means and causes of continuing international deprivation and exploitation, and analyzing their epistemological and psychological effects. Third, transforming those epistemologies into new forms of cultural and political production that operate outside the protocols of metropolitan traditions and enable successful resistance to, and transformation of, the degradation and material injustice to which disempowered peoples and societies remain subjected.³⁶²

In case of the Bodos, we have already addressed the first issue of continuing aftermath of colonization and even the Sanskritization in Chapter One and how they manifested in India. The second concern will be dealt with in the fourth chapter, when I analyze the major theories of Christian religious education. The third concern will be addressed in both the fifth and six chapters, particularly in the fifth chapter when I suggest a new model of Christian religious education for subalterns. However, my proposal will not be based in mere resistance and interrogation of metropolitan traditions/discourse/texts, but will have the goal of moving toward dialectical integration through hospitality and dialogue.

Hard and Negri offer two potential perspectives that crystallize much of what we have discussed thus far in this chapter. The first is what they call *critical and deconstructive* epistemology. It aims to subvert hegemonic languages and social structures and thereby reveal alternative epistemological categories that reside in the creative and productive practices of the multitude. The second is what they call

³⁶² Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2001), 69.

constructive and ethico-political epistemology. It seeks to lead the processes of the production of subjectivity toward the constitution of an effective social, political alternative—a new constituent power.³⁶³ These perspectives offer a means to move beyond education systems that promote domination and exclusion—e.g. structures and practices that are harmful for subalterns—thus allowing retrieval of marginalized and indigenous knowledges and epistemologies.³⁶⁴ They also challenge homogenizing and totalizing knowledge construction, representation, and truth claims³⁶⁵ by inviting engagement not only with the complexities of decolonization, but also with the consequences of globalization in recent decades.³⁶⁶ These tools are particularly useful for exploring educational practice within colonialism, decolonization, and experimentation, not only for the former colonies but also for the former colonial powers.³⁶⁷ They explore multiple ways of knowing the world, and enable us to refine the goals of emancipatory social action in ways that take the needs, aspirations, and practices of specific cultures into account. Critical analysis such as these enable us to see how contemporary social, political, economic and cultural practices continue to operate within the processes of cultural domination through the imposition of imperialist power structures.³⁶⁸

³⁶³ M. Hard and A. Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 47. Italics are in the original. See also Coloma, “Palimpsest History and Catachrestic Intervention” in Coloma ed., *Postcolonial Challenges in Education* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 9.

³⁶⁴ Nina Asher, “Decolonization and Education: Locating Pedagogy and Self at the Interstices in Global Times,” in Coloma, ed., *Postcolonial Challenges in Education* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2009), 67-77.

³⁶⁵ Hickling-Hudson, Matthew and Wood, “Education, Postcolonialism and Disruptions” in Hickling-Hudson et al., eds., *Disrupting Preconceptions: Postcolonialism and Education* (Flaxton, Australia: Post Pressed, 2004), 1-12.

³⁶⁶ Leon Tikly, “Education and New Imperialism” in Coloma, ed., *Postcolonial Challenges*, 24-45.

³⁶⁷ Joerg Rieger calls the “first world” to look at mission afresh from neocolonialism and postcolonialism perspectives not as “guilt trip” but in a way of “in reach” in his essay “Theology and Mission Between Neocolonialism and Postcolonialism” in *Mission Studies*, Koninklinjkk, Brill NV, 21.1, 202-227. See also on online, www.brill.nl.

³⁶⁸ Fazal Rizvi, “Postcolonialism and Globalization in Education” in Coloma, ed., *Postcolonial Challenges*, 46-54.

Postcolonial theories provide perspectives that aid not only in deconstructing the semantics of colonialism, neocolonialism, and imperialism, but also in challenging, resisting, disrupting and in constructing new meanings and symbols.³⁶⁹ These theories also expose how the aid of the developed countries to developing and underdeveloped countries for education can be susceptible in subtle ways in the perpetuation of colonial policies, administrative models, and curricular patterns.³⁷⁰

I have discussed in this section, how postcolonial theoretical concepts can provide perspectives for education, now we move to biblical hermeneutics, one of the key tools in shaping Christian religious education, both in general and in the Bodo context.

III. Biblical Hermeneutics and Subaltern Education

Christian religious education is intrinsically linked with theology, and similarly theology is linked with biblical hermeneutics. Biblical interpretation influences the course of Christian pedagogy. By biblical hermeneutics, I mean the act of interpreting biblical texts based on different approaches and methodologies. Although a few Christian educators such as James Michael Lee argue that Christian religious education need not be a “messenger boy” and “translation of theology,”³⁷¹ theological premises and biblical hermeneutics nonetheless influence Christian religious education. Both theology and Christian religious education shape missionary practices both at home and abroad, and both are rooted in biblical hermeneutics. The challenge here is to determine how to filter

³⁶⁹ Anne Hickling-Hudson, “Southern Theory and Its Dynamics for Postcolonial Education” in Coloma, ed., *Postcolonial Challenges*, 365- 375.

³⁷⁰ Philip G. Altbach, “Education and Neocolonialism” in Bill Ashcroft et al., *Post-colonial*, 452-456.

³⁷¹ James Michael Lee, *The Flow of Religious Instruction: A Social Science Approach* (Ohio: Pflum/Standard, 1973), 18-19.

biblical hermeneutics through postcolonial sensibilities to allow for integrative religious education in subaltern contexts. Indebted to R. S. Sugirtharajah, this section discusses biblical hermeneutics in the colonial and postcolonial periods and then suggests a new biblical hermeneutics more conducive to my ultimate goal of developing an integrative model of Christian religious education in a subaltern approach.

A. A Bird's Eye View of Colonial Hermeneutics

It can be safely said that, among the Bodo churches, biblical hermeneutics is to a large extent what Sugirtharajah calls colonial hermeneutics/interpretation. Colonial hermeneutics engages the Bible in a way that promotes “scriptural imperialism,” an approach still in vogue among many evangelical Christians. Historically, the “defining moment for scriptural imperialism was the formation of the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804 when it solemnly pledged to make dissemination of the Bible to all people its sole intention.”³⁷² The following quotation reflects the resoluteness of the British and Foreign Bible Society and its narrow interpretation of the Bible:

Not only the heathen, but the speech of the heathen, must be Christianized. Their language itself needs to be born again. Their very words have to be converted from souls meanings and base uses and baptized into Christian sense, before those words can convey the great truths and ideas of the Bible.³⁷³

This kind of conception leads to a binary opposition. In defining the other, colonialists often constructed discursive paradigms such as Christian/savage, civilized/barbaric, and orderly/disorderly. Missionary hermeneutics extrapolated from this to inject their biblical values into the private and public life of the native converts.

³⁷² R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 46.

³⁷³ Sugirtharajah, *Bible*, 59; quotes from “The Bible above Every Book” (London: The Bible House, 1910), 22.

For example among the Bodos, the common terms used to express these binaries are *atmic/sansaric* (spiritual/worldly), *srangni fisa/khwmsini fisa* (children of light/children of darkness), and *basaijanai/basaijawi* (saved/unsaved). Agonizingly, these are still in vogue.

Sugirtharaja outlines six hermeneutical approaches of colonial interpretation of the Bible.³⁷⁴ The first is “inculcation interpretation,” in which the Bible was used as a vehicle for inculcating the behaviors and mannerisms of colonial rulers in the native converts. Native customs were regarded as barbaric compared to the civilized and developed customs of biblical religion. This mode of interpretation had immense influence on the production of knowledge and in matters of lifestyle.

The second form of colonial interpretation is the “encroachment interpretation,” where alien values were introduced under the guise of biblicization. This strategy was based on the idea that local cultures would be unable to transmit Christian truth, and therefore they had to be born again, baptized and Christianized in order to incorporate Christian truth. If there was a need, missionaries did not even hesitate to falsify local cultural values or uproot the natives from their socio-cultural roots to achieve their goal. Among the Bodos, Christian missionaries uprooted cultural elements such as dance, musical instruments, and observance of seasonal festivals.

The third interpretative approach is the “displacement interpretation,” which is the opposite of encroachment. Assuming they would find peoples lacking in any sort of cultural or theological development, missionaries instead encountered local cultures brimming with egalitarian values that did not require any replacement with an alien cultural values. Sidney Endle found the egalitarian mode of community life of the Bodos

³⁷⁴ Sugirtharajah, *Bible*, 61-73.

contrary to missionaries' expectations of the time and said: "On the whole it may perhaps be safely said that the social and domestic life of the Kachari [Bodo] is not without pleasing and satisfactory features. It is probably for the most part far sounder and more wholesome than the life of great cities whether in Asia or Europe; [...]." ³⁷⁵ Endle saw "innocence of ignorance" rather than the "innocence of experience" among the Bodos and feared that their community life would be contaminated by western civilization. ³⁷⁶ In such cases, it was not so much a matter of imposing the gospel as much as seeing the "progressive" nature of the gospel as a vehicle for improving upon native cultures. Thus, missionaries did not hesitate to change/replace native cultural values with their own cultural values in order to make room for the "progressive" nature of the gospel.

The fourth colonial interpretation is the "analogies and implication interpretation," under which biblical and secular histories were juxtaposed to justify colonialism and cultural imperialism. There are various ways in which this was done. Among the Bodo Christians, to this day suffering is often seen as a punishment from God without seriously considering the socio-economic-political and cultural domination and exclusion by the dominant groups under internal or neocolonialism. The ongoing movement for a separate state of Bodoland is often juxtaposed with the liberation motif of Exodus in a simplistic way, a kind of cheap spiritualization, without seriously considering the socio-economic-political and cultural ramifications.

The fifth interpretation is the "textualization interpretation," which has become the most popular. Through textualization, missionaries granted a privileged status to a written text over an oral tradition, taking as a fundamental assumption the idea that oral

³⁷⁵ Sidney Endle, *The Kacharis*, (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1911), 23.

³⁷⁶ Endle, *Kacharis*, 3.

cultures were empty and unable to authenticate truth in matters of faith and practice. Thus text and power were intertwined. When questions arose regarding how to incorporate seasonal festivals—such as Magw, also called Domachi (harvest festival), Bwisagw (New Year Festival), and Amthisuwa (Festival of abstinence and replenishment)—into the overall life and practice of Bodo Christians, the missionaries objected, citing an inability to verify the authenticity of festivals because they are not accounted for in written texts.³⁷⁷ Furthermore, they took the firm stance that nothing could be accepted as valuable unless it was in harmony with the Bible, the primary text.

The sixth and final colonial means of interpretation is the “historicization interpretation,” through which missionaries sought to demonstrate the objective historicism of Christian faith. This notion enabled missionaries to portray non-biblical religions and cultures as pagan or undeveloped and in need of improvement, deliverance or even extinction. This led the sacred texts of other religions and oral traditions to be considered as “mythological absurdities and amatory trifles.”³⁷⁸

In summary we can say that colonial hermeneutics failed to account for the role of alien cultures in epistemology and pedagogical practices. Recognizing these colonial interpretations can be an important means to avoid perpetuating unhelpful Christian pedagogical practices among the Bodo churches in Assam, the following sections will address some postcolonial biblical hermeneutics that hope to usher pedagogical productivity for Christian religious education among the Bodo churches.

³⁷⁸ Sugirtharajah, *Bible*, 70.

B. Postcolonial Hermeneutics: Retrieval and Liberation

1. Nativism and Vernacular Hermeneutics

To avoid the kinds of destructive colonial interpretative manifestations noted by Sugirtharaja, Third World biblical scholars have turned their attention to the indigenization of biblical interpretation as a part of the retrieval of their traditions. In India, nativistic and vernacular hermeneutics arose among the Dalits and tribals who underwent the “suffocation of double burden of Western and Sanskrit theories and who wanted to revive their own language traditions.”³⁷⁹ The central task of nativistic and vernacular hermeneutics is the “recovery, reoccupation and reinscription”³⁸⁰ of one’s own erased and disavowed cultural values. It is an attempt to reclaim the degraded and effaced native narratives from their colonial replacements and from mainstream biblical scholarship. It tries to erase the painful memories of the past and make a fresh start by returning to one’s cultural roots, and to lead people to rediscover their cultural religious heritages. It provides a spectrum of indigenous cultural elements to incorporate into worship and pedagogy and creates a self-awareness that allows people to appreciate their own cultures. Teaching and learning is done through the language, idioms, and artifacts of the people. This kind of hermeneutics challenges the Eurocentric, modernistic, and Enlightenment meta-narrative, with its loaded and disembedded universalism.³⁸¹

Sugirtharajah asserts that the nativistic mode of interpretation and its influence on pedagogy is “an offshoot of the crisis of modernism, a reaction to modernism’s alienating

³⁷⁹ R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 12.

³⁸⁰ Sugirtharajah, *Bible*, 177.

³⁸¹ Sugirtharajah, *Bible*, 117-178.

aesthetic and universal claims of knowledge.”³⁸² Nativism is therefore, subaltern; it originates from marginalized groups and is immediate and local. As such, it is in a sense very much postmodern. Of course, there is another way of locating nativism; it also can be placed in the long and rich tradition of nationalism and decolonization. This mode of interpretation seeks to “overcome the remoteness and strangeness” of biblical texts and tries to link across cultural divides by exploring readers’ own resources and “social experiences to illuminate the biblical narratives,”³⁸³ thus leading to the development of an indigenous epistemology.

While nativistic and vernacular hermeneutics has a great deal of appeal, we must recognize that vernacular hermeneutics is not free from limitations as a critical tool for the development of a subaltern epistemology. Positively, vernacular hermeneutics enables Christian pedagogues to help people to regain “credibility and cultivate deeper contact with their own people, who otherwise would have been regarded foreigners in their own country.”³⁸⁴ It also helps to reverse the missionaries’ condemnation of indigenous cultures. It enables a transformative mixing of biblical faith with indigenous religions and helps indigenous cultures to survive. However, there is a tendency to overuse ancient cultural elements in vernacular hermeneutics and in the process there is an inclination to overlook the dehumanizing aspects of a culture. As the pedagogy based on vernacular and nativistic hermeneutics tends to contain various native cultural symbols, one must be careful to scrutinize those symbols. In Indian context one must look for ethnocentrism and discrimination based on caste or gender. Nativistic hermeneutics tends to be apologetic in nature and can suffer from a particularism that

³⁸² Sugirtharajah, *Bible*, 178.

³⁸³ Sugirtharajah, *Bible*, 182.

³⁸⁴ Sugirtharajah, *Bible*, 182.

over-romanticizes culture as if it were “pure” and seeks to retrieve the past as if it were “original.” Pedagogy based on nativistic hermeneutics tends to become “culture specific” and “exclusivistic” in nature as it has a tendency of being “ghettoized and irrelevant to the majority” outside of its fold.³⁸⁵

2. Liberation Hermeneutics

Liberation hermeneutics is another postcolonial hermeneutics. It is an offshoot of liberation theology developed in Latin America and has had an unparalleled influence on the development of subaltern pedagogy. In India, liberation theology and hermeneutics have enjoyed a wide acceptance among Dalits, women, and tribals. Through liberation hermeneutics an attempt is made to reread the Bible “from the underside history” of the subalterns.³⁸⁶ We can outline five characteristics of liberation hermeneutics:³⁸⁷

(1) It is committed to eradicating poverty; any reading of the text or critical reflection is undertaken from this angle. Therefore, its reading is unilateral and radically contextualized based on exploitation, dehumanization and oppression.

(2) It affirms reality as one, and liberation is seen as an all-encompassing phenomenon. There is no space for traditional binaries such as sacred/secular and individual/community; everything coalesces into one unified history. History is seen as the medium of God’s self-disclosure and the site of God’s activity.

(3) It gives a privileged status to the poor. The interpretation of texts is done through the lenses of the poor and the oppressed. So it has a priory position/stand in its

³⁸⁵ Sugirtharajah, *Bible*, 147.

³⁸⁶ D. S. Amalapovadas, “The Bible in Self-renewal and Church-renewal for Service to Society” in S. R. Sugirtharaja, ed., *Voices of the Margins: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 324.

³⁸⁷ Sugirtharajah, *Bible*, 215-238.

approach when it comes to interpretation and in this case it is for the poor.

(4) It abhors the idea of textual neutrality. Neutrality is an illusion. An interpreter has to take side, and in this case the Christian is called to side with the poor.

(5) It holds the view that the credibility of the Bible rests in proper pre-understanding of the biblical text. It takes the position that the text conveys meaning only when it is read from a particular viewpoint. However, it does not undermine the catholicity/universality of the gospel, although it is read from a specific perspective. It claims that it can liberate the gospel message and make concrete the love of God as a justice-making force in history.

Liberation hermeneutics has maintained the liberation motif at the centre of its theological discourse. It draws resources both from modern and postmodern theory, but distances itself from both. It has been observed that liberation hermeneutics is dominated by two narratives: “salvation history” and the “Jesus Christ saga.”³⁸⁸ Liberation hermeneutics gives primary status to God’s self-disclosure through the historical events of Israel. It operates within a conventional biblical understanding, the very model used by missionaries and colonizers in order to subjugate and subdue other peoples’ culture and history. It puts forth an interventionist image of God, depicting him as living outside the history but intervening from time to time in the affairs of the world, with people having to wait for God’s intervention. It is also often overtly Christocentric.³⁸⁹

Furthermore, liberation hermeneutics suffers from textualism, as it ultimately seeks to find a message of liberation in the Bible. So, in an attempt to find this message it employs “new suspicious historical tools, the very tools worked out at the foundry of

³⁸⁸ Sugirtharajah, *Bible*, 239.

³⁸⁹ Sugirtharajah, *Bible*, 240.

modernity.”³⁹⁰ It does need to be said, however, that liberation hermeneutics has made these historical tools ethically more responsible. Even so, although it overrides the Enlightenment concern with the non-believers and focuses instead on non-persons, it does participate in a new kind of reified binarism, dealing with binaries such as rich/poor, oppressed/oppressor, and haves/have-nots, missing complex intersections in which sometimes the oppressed in one instance is also an oppressor. Feminist insights have addressed this as part of postcolonial hermeneutics.

3. Postcolonial Feminist Hermeneutics and Subaltern Education

Feminist scholars, particularly those from Africa and Asia, argue that Western-oriented feminist hermeneutics does not address women’s issues comprehensively enough in their agendas. According to Kwok, they fail to address colonialism, imperialism, racial prejudice, class division, and compulsory heterosexism.³⁹¹ She argues that the early Western feminist theologians, particularly those from the United States, subscribe to binary construction of gender, while their Third World counterparts argue that gender is naturalized and universalized through the history and experiences of white, middle-class Euro-American women. However, with the advent of queer theory in the 1990s, and especially with the publication of Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, feminists in the West began to see the limitations of gender binarism.³⁹² Butler’s work has helped to destabilize notions of gender hierarchy in the thoughts and social practices of feminists. Further, Kwok contends that feminist theologians such as Rosemary Radford Ruether and Letty

³⁹⁰ Sugirtharajah, *Bible*, 241.

³⁹¹ Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imaginations and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 128-130.

³⁹² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

Russell—who suggest a “gendered cultural hermeneutics”—have constantly paid attention to women’s social and political struggles.³⁹³ But a disproportionate amount of time and energy still are spent on the issues of inclusive language and the gender of God, notwithstanding their necessity for shaping consciousness and power construction.

In their work, Proctor- Smith and Duck suggest moving beyond the models of inclusive language and towards an “emancipatory” and “expansive” language in hermeneutics respectively in liturgy.³⁹⁴ However, the concern still remains confined within a “language game,” particularly centered on gender and patriarchy issues. Third World postcolonial feminist theologians want to move beyond the issues of an inclusive (or “emancipatory” and “expansive”) language and gender, and have made repeated appeals to the ecumenical circle to this effect. They feel that the concerns of feminist theologians must move from cultural-symbolic issues to socio-political struggles.³⁹⁵

Third World feminist theologians further argue that white feminist theorists and theologians give priority to gender-based oppression over other forms of discrimination, such as racism, classism, heterosexism, and colonialism. Patriarchy is considered the root cause for societal problems related to woman in the West, and white women are seen as victims rather than participants in oppressive systems. This complicit attitude, Kwok contends, does not take into consideration the interlocking nature of oppression and can

³⁹³ Letty M. Russell suggests, “gendered hermeneutics” in her essay, “Cultural Hermeneutics: A Postcolonial Look at Mission” in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol.1, no.1, Spring (Baltimore: Scholars Press, 1985), 202-227. See also Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro “Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Contribution” in Musa W. Dube, ed., *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 101-113.

³⁹⁴ Proctor- Smith and Duck argue to move from *inclusive language* to *emancipatory language* and *expansive language* respectively. See Marjorie Proctor- Smith, “Women and Worship,” *The New SCM Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, ed., Paul F. Bradshaw (London, UK: SCM Press, 2002), 476-478. See Ruth C. Duck, *Gender and the name of God: The Trinitarian Baptismal Formula* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1991).

³⁹⁵ Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 128-130.

easily obscure how power actually operates in history. History, she argues, has shown that white feminism does not automatically challenge issues like racial prejudice, class division, compulsory heterosexism, and Western colonialism, and can in fact even camouflage them.

Kwok and Robert C. Young find common ground insofar as white feminist theology is not intrinsically anti-imperialist. In a similar vein to Spivak, Kwok argues that the mainstream project of Western feminism is a continued battle between women and men over the right of individualism in situations of upward social mobility.³⁹⁶ Although white feminists of the West have criticized the masculinist image of God, a simple change of gender does not automatically challenge the imperialistic construction of God as the benefactor and patron of white people. In fact, it has been observed that the construction of God as mother, Goddess, or God/dess merely reiterates a concept of gendered difference that only stresses her maternal and nurturing roles. The result can be seen as another attempt by white feminism to avoid social antagonism, in this case through the projection of a benign spiritual figure that is supposed to provide comfort and consolation for all.³⁹⁷ In light of postcolonial feminist theological discourse, Kwok suggests five principles for postcolonial feminist hermeneutics.³⁹⁸

(1) Postcolonial feminist hermeneutics investigates how the symbolization of women and the deployment of gender in texts relate to class interests, modes of production, concentration of state power, and colonial domination.

(2) Postcolonial feminist critics pay special attention to the biblical women in contact zones and present reconstructive readings as counteractive. A contact zone is the

³⁹⁶ Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 128-130.

³⁹⁷ Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 131.

³⁹⁸ Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 131.

space of colonial encounter where people of different geographical and historical backgrounds are brought into contact with each other through unequal and conflictual relations.

(3) Postcolonial feminist hermeneutics scrutinizes metropolitan interpretations, including those offered by both male and feminist scholars, to see if their readings support colonial ideology by glossing over the imperial context and agenda or contribute to imperializing the texts for the sake of liberation.

(4) In order to subvert dominant Western patriarchal interpretations, postcolonial feminist hermeneutics, especially those in Africa, emphasize the roles and contributions of ordinary readers.

(5) Postcolonial critics pay increasing attention to what Mary Ann Tolbert calls the politics and poetics of location. Politics of location refers to the elements of one's social background, such as gender, race, caste, and sexual orientation, as well as one's national and institutional context and economic and educational status, all of which help determine who speaks and who has to listen. Poetic location means that any interpretation, with an assumption of the Bible as a traditionally powerful text, must be evaluated not only on literary or historical merits, but also on theological and ethical impact based on the dignity and integrity of God's creation.

This brief discussion on the postcolonial feminist hermeneutics provides a general idea of how it differs from the mainstream Western feminist hermeneutics. It also shows the heterogeneity of hermeneutical approaches among the subalterns in the so-called Third World countries.

4. Intercultural Hermeneutics in the Dialectics

We have seen the strengths and limitations of nativistic/vernacular and liberation biblical hermeneutics. Although these are both considered postcolonial hermeneutics and helpful in many ways, both modes of interpretation seem to put emphasis on particular locales, especially vernacular/nativistic hermeneutics. Therefore, to properly incorporate postcolonial, postmodern, and feminist concerns, I follow Robert Schreiter's discussion of "intercultural hermeneutics"³⁹⁹ in conjunction with Sugirtharajah's "Vernacular Cosmopolitanism," to which we will return later, as the basis for an integrative Christian religious education. Schreiter has developed this mode of hermeneutics to account for postcolonial and postmodern concerns. As the main concern of this study is culture in relation to Christian religious education, intercultural hermeneutics is appealing for its ability to allow for and include biblical hermeneutics from various angles.

According to Schreiter, intercultural hermeneutics builds upon the ways in which communication takes place between teacher/speaker and learner/hearer from different cultures, with intercultural communication defined as the "ability to speak and to understand across cultural boundaries."⁴⁰⁰ Furthermore, Schreiter differentiates between intercultural hermeneutics and cross-cultural hermeneutics. While the former is concerned with communication across a cultural boundary, the latter is concerned with generalizations that can be made about intercultural communications and applied to intercultural encounters. While intercultural hermeneutics is concerned with the quality and integrity of specific individual communication events, cross-cultural hermeneutics deals with the long-term effects of both messages and interlocutors over multiple

³⁹⁹ Schreiter, *New Catholicity*, 28-34.

⁴⁰⁰ Schreiter, *New Catholicity*, 28.

communication events.⁴⁰¹

According to Schreiter, intercultural hermeneutics has four distinctive characteristics in its approach to epistemology—meaning, truth, sameness/difference, and agency.⁴⁰² First, in any hermeneutics the goal of interpretation is meaning making. Multiple cultures intersect in matters of biblical interpretation: biblical culture (i.e., the culture described in the text), the culture of the interpreter, and, in the case of cross-cultural evangelization/teaching, the culture of the one to whom the text is interpreted. When dealing with intercultural hermeneutics it is necessary to question where the meaning lies. Is it in the mind of the author, as in romantic hermeneutics? Or is it in the text itself, as structuralist and modernist readings would say? Or, is the meaning in front of the text, in the interaction between the text and the reader, as poststructuralists argue? Intercultural hermeneutics claims that there cannot be an effective and appropriate communication between the speaker/teacher and hearer/learner unless there is an intensive, multidimensional dialogue, between the text and the reader, the speaker/teacher and hearer/learner, and the text and the hearer/learner. We cannot expect communication and understanding to be effective if approached from just one angle. Intercultural hermeneutics asserts that in communication the speaker and the hearer do not come together in each other's cultures, but encounter another in interstitial zone (third space) created out of the liminal experience of both interlocutors interacting with one another. In this specially created zone intercultural communication takes place.

A second significant characteristic of intercultural hermeneutics is the way it conceives of truth. Schreiter argues that, in the West, truth claims are adjudicated by

⁴⁰¹ Schreiter, *New Catholicity*, 29.

⁴⁰² Schreiter, *New Catholicity*, 39-44.

recasting the truth questions in propositional form. Intercultural hermeneutics takes the view that approaches based on propositional and referential notions of truth may not be adequate to account for the rich interchange between speaker and hearer, in which meanings expand beyond both. In intercultural hermeneutics both the integrity of the message (its truth) and the identity (culture) of the hearer have to be taken into account, lest there be a systematic experience of epistemological violence. Truth may not be able to be extracted propositionally by the speaker/teacher, as it is embedded in the narratives of living communities.

The third significant characteristic of intercultural hermeneutics is the way it tries to balance difference/contrast and sameness/familiarity between the aims of intercultural and cross-cultural hermeneutics. While intercultural hermeneutics is sensitive to difference and resistant to homogenization, discouraging easy absorption and assimilation, cross-cultural hermeneutics seeks forms of sameness for the sake of communication. The balancing act of difference/contrast and sameness/familiarity has ethical, epistemological and theological significance. On the one hand, denial of difference/contrast can lead to the colonization of a culture and its imagination; on the other, denial of similarity/familiarity promotes an anomic situation where no dialogue appears possible. Hence, balancing difference and sameness is the task of intercultural hermeneutics.⁴⁰³

The fourth significant characteristic of intercultural hermeneutics is the healthy sense of agency that it requires. In intercultural hermeneutics both the speaker/teacher (messenger) and the hearer/learner (receiver) are mutually influenced, whether positively

⁴⁰³ Schreiter, *New Catholicity*, 42-43.

or negatively, and transformed.⁴⁰⁴ No subject is robbed of subjectivity, as there can be no passive or inert participants in intercultural communication. In Christian evangelization and pedagogy, when too much emphasis is given to the rightness of the message/content/text, less emphasis is put on the transformation of the speaker/teacher, and when too much emphasis is given to syncretistic character of the content/message/text, less emphasis is given to the transformation of the hearers/learners.

Together with Schreiter's constructs, I would add the fifth characteristics to intercultural hermeneutics, which aspires to be dialectically integrated/whole, looking at truths, meanings, and values of the Bible both from the perspective of a particular, familiar context (culture, community, or self), and in relation to another context, with the two coming together in conversation. Intercultural hermeneutics tries to interpret Biblical texts, images, and symbols through the lens of a particular community's own sense of itself, but at the same time to move beyond this specific context. It engages in reconstructive readings of biblical texts from a postcolonial perspective.⁴⁰⁵ This may require a culture or community to revise their own system of references, norms, and values as a result of encountering and engaging with another culture or community.

In this view the goal of intercultural hermeneutics for dialectical integration is not to execute the mere appropriation and adaptations of once disavowed and erased cultural elements, but to use these elements as a way of accessing more substantial or profound cultural meanings. On the one hand, it scrutinizes biblical documents from colonial entanglement and on the other interrogates biblical interpretations from both dominant/colonial and marginal contexts and seeks to achieve to what Sugirtharajah calls

⁴⁰⁴ Schreiter, *New Catholicity*, 43-44.

⁴⁰⁵ Sugirtharajah, *Bible*, 251-255.

“vernacular cosmopolitanism” through “contrapuntal readings.”⁴⁰⁶ Vernacular cosmopolitanism means an attempt to move beyond the shackles of reified binarism by recognizing the mutual connection of the cosmopolitan and vernacular, dominant and marginal, and mainstream and the periphery. It is a discursive reading practice that anticipates complex negotiations of meanings and thus is open to ambiguity and tension. In the Indian context, such interpretations must go beyond “identity hermeneutics” of the Dalits and tribals and also beyond the “high-caste moorings”⁴⁰⁷ of the Sanskritic design. Intercultural hermeneutics is not constrained by old boundaries and entrenched positions, but allows transgressions and novel positions to emerge. In the process of interpretation, its openness cannot help but repel “Christian superiority and smugness.”⁴⁰⁸

I have examined postcolonial, postcolonial feminist hermeneutics and intercultural hermeneutics in the previous section. I also have examined how intercultural hermeneutics can be an integrative tool for Christian religious education, particularly in terms of communication. Understanding all of this will require us to reflect further on how we understand culture/community.

IV. Culture: Modern and Postcolonial/Postmodern Understandings

In this section I shall discuss two concepts of culture, namely: the modernist or integrated concept of culture, representative of modernist and structuralist traditions, and the postcolonial/postmodern or globalized concept of culture, representative of poststructuralist traditions. We have already discussed the modernist or integrated

⁴⁰⁶ R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfiguration: An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology* (St. Louis, Mo: Chalice Press, 2003), 162-174. See also Sugirtharajah, *The Bible*, 251-255.

⁴⁰⁷ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial*, 162-174.

⁴⁰⁸ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial*, 162-174.

concept of culture drawn from Geertz and the structuralist tradition, in which culture is viewed as an integrated whole, internally consistent and unified in beliefs and values. However, understandings of culture have changed and shifted. Dipankar Gupta observes that there is a general disagreement among sociologists and anthropologists regarding how to define culture and how to delineate between what does and does not constitute a culture.⁴⁰⁹ Volker Kuster notes that, by 1950, Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn had identified 160 definitions of culture.⁴¹⁰ Schreiter refers to culture as a notoriously “slippery concept”⁴¹¹ without a definitive definition. Here, I will draw upon his work and that of Kathryn Tanner to discuss the two general conceptions of culture mentioned above. While Tanner calls the poststructuralist tradition’s understanding of culture “postmodern,”⁴¹² Schreiter refers to it as multiple “globalized concepts of culture.”⁴¹³ Since Schreiter derives this notion from postcolonial theory, I will use the terms “globalized” and “postcolonial” interchangeably.

The integrated or modernist concept of culture also can be called traditional and conventional. Such an understanding depicts culture as a patterned system in which various elements are coordinated harmoniously, and thus culture can be treated as an integrated, unified system. There is a sense of recurrence and sameness due to perceived consistency among patterns, and the participants in a culture are seen to express identity and solidarity. The familiarity of pattern also provides a sense of security and a feeling of

⁴⁰⁹ Dipankar Gupta, *Culture, Space and the Nation- State* (New Delhi, London: Sage Publication, 2000), 17-19.

⁴¹⁰ Volker Kuster, “The Project of an Intercultural Theology” in *Swedish Missiological Themes*, 93, 3 (2005). It is also available online at, www.brill.nl, 417-432. See also Alfred L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definition* (Cambridge: Mass, 1952).

⁴¹¹ Schreiter, *New Catholicity*, 29.

⁴¹² Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 38-56.

⁴¹³ Tanner, *Theories*, 53-57.

being “at home.” We can see this model operating in traditional societies, which are self-enclosed, self-sufficient, governed by rules. The theory’s credibility rests on common experiences drawn from one’s own culture, with various elements such as ideas, rules, values, rituals, and material artifacts seeming to fit together in a coherent structure.⁴¹⁴ An integrated or modern concept of culture has merit for a number of reasons. It serves as a firm base for values that most would want to uphold. It is also seen as a holistic, integrated, bounded, and synchronistic, and this coherence provides homeostasis and stability to communities.⁴¹⁵

However, despite these merits, the integrated or modern concept of culture is not free from limitations. Its critics say that integration is a myth, and accuse the concept of being hopelessly vague. Critics argue that the promise of cultural integration obscures cultural dynamics and their interaction with other system within society, and warn that the integrating tendency of this concept of culture is static and fixed at best and totalizing and essentializing at worst. This concept suppresses or excludes that which cannot be assimilated and integrated. The critics argue that the notion of a culture as an internally consistent whole is a hypothetical construction that distorts the realities of lived experience. The notion is based on disparate observations of events and discussions with individuals, but never appears to reflect the actual circumstances in which members of a community live their day-to-day lives. Since culture does not appear whole to the participants, the notion of wholeness is revealed as an exclusive privilege of the anthropologist’s perspective, a projection that tends toward colonialist objectification and homogenization. Since the notion of culture as a consistently unified whole is purely

⁴¹⁴ Schreiter, *New Catholicity*, 47-49.

⁴¹⁵ Tanner, *Theories*, 29-36. Tanner’s position is in similar line with Geertzian concept of culture.

hypothetical, the notion of cultural consensus must be recognized as similarly illusory. This notion is driven by the incorrect notion that there is a singular “native point of view,” a notion based on an appearance of consensus that only holds up to the shallowest examination.⁴¹⁶ Liberationists, feminists, and postcolonial theorists out-rightly reject this concept of culture, arguing that it stands unjustified in the face of increasingly accepted notions of pluralism.

Critics of this concept of culture also charge its adherents with a failure to understand the role of history in the construction and formation of culture. This approach starts with the notion that culture can be understood as something already formed and finished. It gives some acknowledgement to the role of human construction in culture, but it does not give sufficient attention to the activity of production itself. Consequently, it assumes that culture is constructed or produced apart from the historical processes in and through which it emerges. Tanner argues that this dehistoricizing of culture is motivated by expediency.⁴¹⁷

On the other hand, under the postcolonial/postmodern or globalized concept of culture, culture is understood with an emphasis on difference, negotiation, indeterminacy, fragmentation, conflict, and porosity. Even within a culture globalization has undeniably played a role, where “cultural products, symbols and patterns” are communicated to regions throughout the world via mass media.⁴¹⁸ Generally, this kind of cultural flow can be seen most strongly among society’s middle class. In this concept of culture, there is recognition of global-local encounters, which manifest in uneven, asymmetrical, unequal, and sometimes violent ways. The global-local encounters are experienced as disruptive as

⁴¹⁶ Tanner, *Theories*, 45-47.

⁴¹⁷ Tanner, *Theories*, 40-56.

⁴¹⁸ Tanner, *Theories*, 38.

global markets enter local cultures and rearrange them.

Hyper-reflexivity and risk are the main characteristics of postcolonial concept of culture,⁴¹⁹ and, as such, in this new account of culture there arises the constant possibility of change within and without as part of historical process, without even requiring an external influence. Culture has its own internal motivators of change, such as fluid forms of interpretation, loosely connected cultural elements that can be ordered or reordered, various social elements that can be contested, belief and value systems that are logically incompatible, even politically opposed forces. There is, therefore, what Bourdieu calls a “necessary improvisation”⁴²⁰ within cultural rules as part of historical processes. Since change, conflict, and contradiction are acknowledged there is no longer a belief in sharp boundaries.

The postcolonial/postmodern or globalized concept of culture has a number of strengths. It acknowledges that the ideal of a coherent harmonious culture is unrealistic, and that life is experienced as fragmented, conflictual, and disoriented. Every aspect of culture becomes a fragile act of translation, a piecing together, a transposition from one context to another, and a struggle to produce meaning. It also brings the problem of power more directly and centrally into focus, and is better able to trace its vagaries and to analyze oppression. While the integrated concept of culture does a poor job of understanding and accounting for social change, the postcolonial concept assumes change as the normal state of affairs. It challenges notions of homeostasis and homogeneity.

However, critics point out a number of weaknesses in the postcolonial or global concept of culture. First, they identify a weakness in this concept of culture for its lack of

⁴¹⁹ Tanner, *Theories*, 38.

⁴²⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 8.

telos; in a focus on social changes, lost is the ability to discern directions and aims in the changes that might be based in a shared sensibility and collective momentum. They argue, consequently, without *telos* there cannot be meaningful dialogue/conversation for genuine integration between local and global cultures, because there are many incompatible and contradictory movements of history operating simultaneously.⁴²¹

Building on the first criticism, a second weakness is that, because of incompatible and coexistent logics within cultures, its accounts of change remain theoretically weak. The third weakness in this conception of culture suggests that if cultures go through violent ruptures or changes, then it becomes necessary to examine whether or not they are fundamentally violent. Following Young, Schreiter says perhaps many postcolonial theorists would agree, arguing that a given culture is violent because of the “constant construction and reconstruction of cultures and cultural difference” as a result of “internal dissent” created by imbalanced capitalist economic structures.⁴²² A final weakness lies in its inability to locate what counts for continuity and stability in culture, such that communities ascribe to shared meanings and practices. There should be, therefore, a dialectical integration between the two concepts of culture, in the forms of sameness and difference, continuity and change, and repetition and rupture.

Conclusion: Toward a Dialectical Reconstruction

The main objective of this chapter has been to derive theoretical perspectives from postcolonial theory, postcolonial hermeneutics, and a postcolonial or postmodern understanding of culture for education in subaltern contexts, such as among the Bodos.

⁴²¹ Schreiter, *New Catholicity*, 57-58.

⁴²² Schreiter, *New Catholicity*, 58. See also Robert C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), 29-54.

Whether it is postcolonial theory, hermeneutics, or culture, the central focus of our discussion has been culture and its relation to education. We have discussed both the strengths and limitations of both the postcolonial/postmodern concept of cultures and its modernist counterpart. The next step is to question whether or not a community/society is actually well understood by either of these two concepts of culture alone, or if some form of integration might be more useful. Perhaps, it is the case that, even if we cannot reconcile these two concepts of culture convincingly, the realities of a living community/society reflect ongoing dialectical tensions between the two. Based on Bhabha's notion of cultural hybridity, Tanner's reconstruction of postmodern understanding of culture,⁴²³ and Reynolds' notion of dialectical pluralism, I propose to reconstruct the concept of culture as a dialectically integrated whole. Thus, whether through a hybridic concept of culture/community or through intercultural hermeneutics or communication, I find a possibility of conversational matrixes of differences taking place among cultures, in which interactive "in-between zones" of meaning are created and out of which something cohesive and shared might emerge. As there are still obviously lingering problems with the postcolonial/postmodern concept of culture, let me address the issues via Tanner and Reynolds.

According to Tanner, the postmodern understanding of culture does not completely deny certain established values and practices that are assumed by a community, which can be applied in education. These established values and practices are relatively stable cultural configurations of a community for living together. In similar line Reynolds upholds that there has to be some form of sameness/familiarity and continuity in a culture/community, without which, it may end up in a "pluralism of

⁴²³ Tanner, *Theories*, 56-58.

dispersion” that trivializes the very concept of differences.⁴²⁴ The main task of postcolonial critics or postmodern anthropologists is to decenter dominant meanings, images, concepts, and ideologies in proper historical processes. Postcoloniality is focused on disrupting dominant ideologies that have totalizing and homogenizing tendencies based on “objectivist and universalizing rationality,”⁴²⁵ whether imposed by colonial powers or dominant native groups. It similarly does not deny the fact that meanings, values, and other cultural elements may be consensually accepted and shared by the members of a community/group, in some way functioning to consolidate and solidify that group’s social relations and interactions. In fact, such a process may occur in pronounced terms if a community or group perceives itself or its culture to be in threat or at risk.

The postmodern concept of culture acknowledges that homogeneity, order, and consistency may be present in culture as provisional results of historical process and power relations. But these features cannot be assumed in all cases as *a priori* ingredients of culture. Rather than assumed coherence, the postmodern/postcolonial understanding of culture considers cultures as contingent wholes with internal contradictions, contradictions that, in turn, do not prevent the culture(s) from functioning as a whole. Crucially, a community or group is not necessarily tied together by consensual agreement regarding central meanings and concepts, but rather by a *shared engagement with them*. Participants are bound together by common attachment or investment in key meanings and values that play out in an ongoing conversation rather than a reified set of terms that each individual understands in the same way.⁴²⁶

A community, thus, functions in the dialectic of these two concepts of culture.

⁴²⁴ See Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, 73-76, where he reconsiders postmodern thoughts.

⁴²⁵ Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, 73-76.

⁴²⁶ Tanner, *Theories*, 73-76.

Therefore, a community also exists within the dialectics of continuity and change, tradition and contemporaneity, convention and innovation, and repetition and rupture. Furthermore, a community also functions in the modes of “letting-be-difference” and “being-with” with others through conversation/dialogue.⁴²⁷ A discipline like Christian religious education does not function well in an “either or” concept of culture, but can thrive within a “both and” concept of culture. It has to strive towards a dialectical integration/whole, with both of concepts of culture operating in a community’s teaching and learning activities. I will discuss the possibilities of dialectical integration/whole concerning these two concepts within a community and also with other communities as part of my suggestion for an integrative model of Christian religious education in Chapters Five and Six. Before this, however, and in light of what we just discussed, it is important to analyze the present Christian religious education program in the Bodo context and the major theories of Christian religious education.

⁴²⁷ See Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, Chapter Four. The concept of dialectical integration/whole is discussed fully in pages 231-233 of the fifth chapter.

Chapter Four

An Analysis of Major Theories of Christian Religious Education in Light of Contextual Theologies from a Postcolonial Perspective

Human agency is practice invested with subjectivity, meaning, and to a greater or lesser extent power. It is, in short, motivated.⁴²⁸

Introduction

After the completion of my Bachelor of Divinity in 1983, at the Union Biblical Seminary, Yavatmal, Maharashtra, India (now relocated to Pune), the Executive Committee of the North Bank Baptist Christian Association (NBBCA)⁴²⁹ assigned Isen Pegu⁴³⁰ and me to visit churches in Assam for three months. In our visit, which started in Lakhimpur and passed through Sonitpur to end in the Darrang (now Udalguri) district, we noticed contrast in different churches comprised of different ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups. We experienced a warm welcome and hospitality everywhere we went, transcending minor or major cultural differences, united through Christian faith and love. I still remember what Mrs. Erpha Dhan told me: “Brother, we Christians are one in Christ’s love.”⁴³¹ For me, these words were doubly significant. The Bodoland movement had just begun. When we visited the Gohpur area in the Sonitpur district, we could see the remains of recently burnt houses. Despite this, I was accepted, welcomed, and offered

⁴²⁸ Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol.1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 10.

⁴²⁹ North Bank Baptist Christian Association (NBBCA) is one of the major Baptist groups in northeast India comprised of over thousand local congregations from Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

⁴³⁰ Mr. Isen Pegu is from the Mishing Tribe in Assam. He worked as a Principal at John Firth Christian High School, Lakhimpur, Assam.

⁴³¹ At that time Erpha Dhan was President of the Lakhimpur Baptist Christian Women Association.

hospitality with love and care among non-Bodos because I was a Christian.

On the other hand, we came across another story of one group called Deshio Baptist Sabha (National Baptist Convention, NBC), particularly active in Sonitpur and Lakhimpur districts that broke away from the NBBCA in 1967. Social interactions between these two groups (NBBCA and NBC), such as marriage and community work were discouraged and even in cases prohibited, despite both groups being from the same Adivasi community and even some from the same families.⁴³² We learned that one of the issues of division was the use of a drum called *nagra*, a traditional drum of the Adivasis.⁴³³ Adivasi youth began to use the *nagra* in their worship as a means of reclaiming their cultural heritage, but missionaries and the native church leaders of the time vehemently rejected and opposed the move.

Schism and division is part of the history of Christianity, in many cases occurring on theological grounds. This particular rift also involved hermeneutical and cultural elements. The basis of prohibition in the use of *nagra* that led to division was grounded on a biblical injunction: “Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).⁴³⁴ This was interpreted as necessitating that all new Christians leave behind every “previous” cultural element considered heathen or devilish upon conversion. In this case above, *nagra* fell into such a category, and thus its use in Christian worship was forbidden. This demonstrates the problems both with narrow interpretations of Bible and with acts of cultural imperialism grounded in theology.

⁴³² Adivasi means aborigines. Munda, Santal, Uraon, Oriya, and Saora etc. communities are categorized as adivasis in Assam. They are demanding for schedule tribe status in Assam.

⁴³³ Nagra is a half oval shape of drum of the Adivasis and one of the most important musical instruments in their socio-cultural life.

⁴³⁴ The Bible, (NIV).

In the case of the Bodos in NBBCA, the prohibition of use of traditional, indigenous musical instruments, such as the *kham* (drum), *siphung* (flute), and *jotha* (cymbal), and traditional dances was replete among Bodo Christians until the 1980s, when young Christians endeavored to bring them back into use.⁴³⁵ Now they are, at least, used in youth and cultural programs at the Annual Conferences. These are some examples of cultural imperialism continuing after territorial decolonization. In the first chapter, I explained how the dominant Assamese group tried to silence Bodos from speaking and learning their own language through overt political maneuvering. Here, we see another form of silencing, carried out through Christian religious education. For the Bodos there was fundamentally no difference between these two experiences.

In any educational enterprise human agency plays a pivotal role and this agency is embedded in the web of human cultures. Missionaries carried out educational programs in mission fields influenced by their understandings of religion that were culturally and historically conditioned. Their teaching also took place within the context of colonialism. The prevalent watchword among Bodo churches that I encountered from diverse ecclesiastical backgrounds was ‘missionary teachings’, teachings that had enormous impact, whether positively or negatively. During my decade-long association with the NBBCA, I became all too familiar with such missional episteme, that is, features of missionary teachings—similar to what Foucault called “pastoral regime”⁴³⁶—that are firmly established and implemented without question. These teachings were not codified, but rather handed down orally and followed without any critical reflection. Appealing to

⁴³⁵ Boro Baptist Church Convention (BBCC), Tukrajhar, Assam, still does not allow the use of traditional musical instruments and Bodo traditional dances in worship, teaching and in any other Christian activity. They are under one of the Australian Baptist groups.

⁴³⁶ Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 10-15.

them was a common response regarding any vital issue in churches. Foucault's pastoral regime thus not only played out in post-Enlightenment Western social structures. In the form of a missional episteme, a similar dynamic occurred in Third World contexts where colonial power and authority could be reiterated and enacted. Even after territorial decolonization, the knowledge and power of the missionaries' teachings continued to be an "enormous historical force" for the NBBCA churches, particularly in constructing different images of Christian and non-Christian communities based on their theologies.⁴³⁷ Missionaries quite often failed to understand the full and far-reaching implications of their teachings, actions and power.⁴³⁸ In certain cases the native churches reconstructed and reinscribed Christian images through the lens of their own histories and cultures, sometimes as acts of open defiance, sometimes through strikingly imaginative cultural subversion and re-presentation, and sometimes in silent, sullen resistance.⁴³⁹

However, in other cases "they [native churches] escaped without leaving it [the dominant order]." ⁴⁴⁰ Whether or not it was "benign" on the part of the missionaries, the colonial project was an effort to impose on the natives a particular way of seeing and being, an episteme, to the point of requiring them to disavow cultural elements that they held near and dear. In this chapter I will address how and in what ways cultural imperialism was perpetuated in and through the power and knowledge of Christian religious education among the Bodo churches via the pastoral regime and discuss its lingering epistemological and psychological after-effects on the Bodo Christians.

⁴³⁷ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation*, 4.

⁴³⁸ T. O. Beidelman, *Colonial Evangelism: A Socio-Historical study of an African Mission at the grassroots* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 27.

⁴³⁹ Beidelman, *Colonial Evangelism*, xii.

⁴⁴⁰ Beidelman, *Colonial Evangelism*, xii, see also Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Every Life* trans. S. F. Rendell (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), xiii.

My argument in this chapter is that to develop an alternative model of Christian religious education in the Bodo context in a subaltern approach there is a need to investigate the cultural imperialism (colonial legacy) perpetuated in and through Christian religious education and, accordingly, analyze the present theories/models of Christian religious education in their historical, cultural, ideological and theological contexts from a postcolonial perspective. Part of this requires exploring the complicit relationship among colonialism, mission, theology, education and Christian religious education in order to identify the colonial legacy. It is also important to critically analyze via a postcolonial perspective the role of culture or context in the contemporary approaches of Christian religious education.

Thus, in light of the work done in previous chapters, I will now analyze Christian religious education approaches. This chapter is broken up into three main sections. The first deals with Christian religious education in the Bodo churches as a general historical background, with specific attention paid to the following aspects: the complicity between empire, evangelism and education; the relationship between education (secular and religious) and theology; and education as preparation for evangelism (*preparatio evangelica*). In the second section I will address particularly the traditional approach/model of Christian religious education in the Bodo context. In the third section I will analyze some major theories/approaches of Christian religious education, drawing mainly from Seymour and Miller's *Contemporary Approaches to Christian Education*⁴⁴¹

⁴⁴¹ Jack L. Seymour and Donald E. Miller, eds., *Contemporary Approaches to Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982).

in correlation with the models of contextual theologies suggested by Stephen B. Bevans in his work *Models of Contextual Theology*.⁴⁴²

I. Historical Context of Christian Religious Education in Bodo Churches

In this section I locate the Christian religious education among the Bodo churches in their historical context. Historically, Christian religious education programs at Bodo churches, as in many mission fields, were generally adapted from the Christian religious educational programs of the home missions, “following the colonial tradition of sharing wealth, resources, knowledge, and enlightenment with those in the South.”⁴⁴³ As such, we have to contextualize the Christian religious education encountered by the Bodos within a broader understanding of missionary activities in India and elsewhere.

The Christian missionary activities in Assam started after the 1826 Yandaboo Treaty, a result of the Anglo-Burmese war in 1826. In that year Assam was annexed to the British Empire. The British Commissioner (and agent of the Governor-general) in Assam, Major Francis Jenkins, found that the native Khamtis of Sadiya, Assam⁴⁴⁴ were “not only a nuisance, but treacherous and tricky as well”⁴⁴⁵ and that they caused problems in the smooth functioning of British colonial rule. Major Jenkins believed that “the only thing that [would] make them better [was] Christianity.”⁴⁴⁶ With this conviction in mind, Major Jenkins extended an invitation to the Baptist Mission Society (BMS) in Calcutta

⁴⁴² Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992).

⁴⁴³ Leona M. English, “Third Space Practitioner: Women Educating for Justice in the Global South” in *Adult Education Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 2, 2005, 85-86.

⁴⁴⁴ At present Khamtis is one of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.

⁴⁴⁵ J. V. Hluna, *Education and Missionaries in Mizoram* (Guwahati, Delhi: Spectrum Publications, 1992), 38.

⁴⁴⁶ Hluna, *Education*, 38.

(now Kolkata) to send missionaries to Assam. However, the British missionaries felt that it would be more convenient for the American Baptist missionaries in Burma (Myanmar) to go. When an invitation was extended to them, they responded readily.⁴⁴⁷ Thus the missionary activity in Assam was a direct result of British colonialism, as a strategic part of the “civilizing mission” of the colonial project and to make “better human beings” of the colonial subjects. This sort of conflation of Christianity with European civilizing impulses—where power and knowledge intersected—was common in missionary activities. Berman points out that particularly the nineteenth century missionaries in Africa disseminated both mission and empire without separation, because, Christianity was equated with European civilization.⁴⁴⁸ In carrying out this program, the Western episteme, its knowledge and practices, was considered panacea to all problems in the native lands.

A. Complicity between Empire, Education, and Evangelism (The “3 Es”)

The relationship between empire, evangelism (mission), and education (religious or secular) is complex. Rieger quotes Bosch, saying that to “missionize is to colonize and colonize to missionize.”⁴⁴⁹ However, the relationship between mission and empire depended on the local situation and circumstances. Unlike the French and Spanish

⁴⁴⁷ Hluna, *Education*, 38-39. Reverend Nathan Brown, Reverend O.T. Cutter, and their wives arrived at Sadiya as the first Baptist missionaries in Assam on March 20, 1836, followed by Miles Bronson on July 5, 1937. In 1840 and 1868, mission work was extended to Naga Hills and Garo Hills (then part of the state of Assam) respectively.

⁴⁴⁸ Edward H. Berman, *African Reactions to Missionary Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1940), 6. See also Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 42.

⁴⁴⁹ See Joerg Rieger, “Theology and Mission Between Neocolonialism and Postcolonialism” in *Mission Studies*, © 2004 Koninklijke NV, 21.2, 202-227, see also online, www.brill.nl or see also David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 306.

assimilationist policies in Africa and South America, the East India Company in India initially adopted a policy of noninterference in matters of religion. For example, William Carey, the first British Baptist missionary, who landed in Calcutta 1793, was prohibited from residing there for fear that the interference with the native religions would adversely affect the British Empire.⁴⁵⁰ It was only in 1813 that missionaries were allowed to enter India and carry out their work. Once missionary activities were allowed, the British Government also funded their educational activities, though such funding declined towards the end of their rule.⁴⁵¹ Missionaries in India carried out education in both humanities and religion on the behest of British government. We can observe the following key features in the complicit relationship among empire, mission and education in India.

First, Gauri Viswanathan points out that in the beginning the educational policies of the British government and those of the missionaries in India were “far from complementary and mutually supportive.”⁴⁵² Although there was no tension between British government and missionaries regarding education in general, there were differences of opinion on the issue of moral education to make the natives “morally upright,” who they thought had “many immoral and disturbing habits.”⁴⁵³ The British administrators felt that even the Oriental literatures were inadequate to meet such needs. The conflict regarding moral education—i.e., between the missionaries’ opposition to

⁴⁵⁰ Hluna, *Education*, 16.

⁴⁵¹ See Hayden A. J. Bellenoit, *Missionary Education and Empire in Late Colonial India* (London: Picketing and Chatto, Publishers, 2007). In his work Bellenoit shows, how the British Government funded London Missionary Society (LMS), Christian Missionary Society (CMS) and Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) in their missionary work, particularly in education.

⁴⁵² Gauri Viswanathan, “The Beginnings of English Literary Study in British India” in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The post-colonial studies reader* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 431-437.

⁴⁵³ Viswanathan, “Beginnings,” 432.

secular modes of education and the British administrators' opposition to religion—was productively resolved by the passing of the “English Education Act, 1835.” This Act established English literature as the basis for education and both missionaries and British administrators mutually considered “a perfect synthesis of the two opposing positions.”⁴⁵⁴ The basic assumption of this move was that English literature was ingrained with the truths of Christianity. This move was based on the ideas of Thomas Macaulay and his brother-in-law Charles Trevelyan, who demonstrated the “diffusive benevolence of Christianity” in English literature. Thus, the colonial education strategy was to use these texts as “surrogates” for the colonial rulers in the “highest and most perfect state,”⁴⁵⁵ to inculcate moral law among the subjects, and to bring them under the authority of God as a means of maintaining socio-political control.

Second, in India, colonial educational policy was governed by Thomas Macaulay's “Minute on Indian Education” (1835),⁴⁵⁶ which has become the defining moment for the colonial educational agenda. The British Indian government sought to create a class of interpreters to moderate between the colonizers and millions whom they governed—“a class of persons of Indian origin in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinion, in morals and in intellect.”⁴⁵⁷ The goal of education was thus to civilize and raise up Indian men and women to carry out administrative works of the colonial project. The colonial educational policies in India were generally elitist, based on a premise of “downgrade filtration,” in which a small group of Indians with a British education would supposedly spread enlightenment to the masses. As a result, while both humanities and

⁴⁵⁴ Viswanathan, “Beginnings,” 432- 434.

⁴⁵⁵ Viswanathan, “Beginnings,” 437.

⁴⁵⁶ G. M. Young, “Speeches of Lord Macaulay with his Minute on Indian Education” in Ashcroft et al., eds., *Post-colonial*, 428-430.

⁴⁵⁷ Young, “Speeches of,” 430.

religious education contributed towards institutional change, “such change did not necessarily equal social change” among the Indian peoples.⁴⁵⁸

Third, Cohn points out that the production and dissemination of colonial forms of knowledge were carried out through different modalities, such as the Historiographic modality, the Observational modality, the Survey modality, the Enumerative modality, the Museological modality, the Surveillance modality and the Investigative modality.⁴⁵⁹ There is nothing inherently wrong with any of these modalities, but they were used primarily with the goal of the “objectification” of Indian subjects in order to support British rule and control. Through the process of colonization the British entered “a new world that they tried to comprehend using their own forms of knowing and thinking,” and more, by imposing those forms of knowledge on the colonized.⁴⁶⁰ The British thus “invaded and conquered not only the territory but an epistemological space as well.”⁴⁶¹ The production of colonial knowledge also helped to objectify social, cultural, and linguistic differences in India, yielding a panoptical view of the colonial subjects.⁴⁶² This firmly established educational programs as part of the imperial project in India. Thus India, the largest and the most important colony of the British Empire became a theatrical space of imperial power. Missionaries, in carrying out the educational projects, followed some of these patterns, if not all.

Fourth, since education, both secular and religious, was an integral part of “civilizing mission,” it sought methodically to “make history” for the colonized natives

⁴⁵⁸ Bellenoit, *Missionary Education*, 4-5.

⁴⁵⁹ For details of these modalities, see Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 5-15.

⁴⁶⁰ Cohn, *Colonialism*, 5-15.

⁴⁶¹ Cohn, *Colonialism*, 5-15.

⁴⁶² Cohn, *Colonialism*, 8.

who were considered ethnological island “without “history”⁴⁶³ and to bring native people into a social order imbued with the colonizer’s moral values. It sought to impart forms of knowledge to the colonized native cultures, which were seen as formless, and to replace the chaos of savage life with civilized rationality.⁴⁶⁴ The missionaries imposed their practices and beliefs, which were considered as “rational” by many so called sociologists, on the converts. However, these were not objectively rational so much as fixed within a particular Western cultural purview.⁴⁶⁵ Comaroff and Comaroff describe the relationship between empire, evangelism (mission), and education by pointing that “[the] impact of Protestant evangelists as harbingers of industrial capitalism lay in the fact that their civilizing mission was simultaneously symbolic and practical, theological and temporal,” and extended to political, social, and economic spheres.⁴⁶⁶

Finally, the missionary educational programs, both religious and secular in the colonies were carried out with both sense of “duty and domination” and a problematic sense of “paternal guardianship.”⁴⁶⁷ Missionaries often demonstrated a more radical and morally intense commitment to social transformation than political administrators and businessmen. They went as far as to demand the rejection of cultural forms that were not in conflict with biblical tenets, such as traditional dress, music, grooming, diet, and naming.⁴⁶⁸ Missionaries sometimes demanded from the natives a level of Christian conduct beyond what they experienced at home, particularly with regards to docility,

⁴⁶³ It was Hegel who considered Africans without history and justified British colonialism in India. See Robert C. Young, *White Mythologies: Writing history and the West* (London, New York: Routledge, 1990), 7-12.

⁴⁶⁴ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation*, 14.

⁴⁶⁵ Beidelman, *Colonial Evangelism*, 3-4.

⁴⁶⁶ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation*, 8-9.

⁴⁶⁷ Rene Maunier, *The Sociology of Colonies* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), 168, 249.

⁴⁶⁸ Beidelman, *Colonial Evangelism*, 11.

obedience, sacrifice, and efficiency.⁴⁶⁹ Driven by the sole and explicit aim of reconstructing the “native” world in the name of God and Western civilization, the missionaries, particularly certain nonconformist Protestant evangelists, were not only the vanguard of imperialism but also the most active cultural agents of empire.⁴⁷⁰

Colonialism does not always manifest in matters of political rule; sometimes it manifests in “seizing and transforming ‘others’ by the very act of conceptualizing, inscribing, and interacting with them on terms not of their choosing, in making them into the pliant objects and silenced subjects of script and scenarios; in assuming the capacity to ‘represent’ them, the active verb itself conflating politics and poetics.”⁴⁷¹

Porter claims that the tenuous relationship among empire, evangelism, and education was more prominent in Africa. Although there were “many pressures distancing missions and their goals from empire,”⁴⁷² Africans did not see any difference between a colonial administrator and missionary, protestations to the contrary notwithstanding. Even before the Berlin Conference, Africans were fearful that “missionaries were the thin edge of a wedge”⁴⁷³ that would open Africa to an eventual takeover by outside power. Cetewayo, a Zulu leader in the 1870s, is reputed to have said of the missionary presence in his territory, “first a missionary, then a consul, and then come army [*sic*].”⁴⁷⁴ There were mainly two reasons for this: first, missionaries’ own lack of a steadfast imperial commitment, and second, while perhaps not advocating empire directly, their association with its institutions and beliefs made the connection to

⁴⁶⁹ Beidelman, *Colonial Evangelism*, 11.

⁴⁷⁰ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation*, 6.

⁴⁷¹ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation*, 15.

⁴⁷² Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and overseas expansion, 1700-1984* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), 316.

⁴⁷³ Porter, *Religion*, 15.

⁴⁷⁴ Porter, *Religion*, 15.

imperialism overt.⁴⁷⁵ Therefore, Porter observes that “despite their best intentions” the missionaries could be “effective empire builders.”⁴⁷⁶ Colonialism was perpetuated not only through political/economic spheres but also through cultural domination, with social change enforced through epistemological and pedagogical practices. Any educational enterprise that involves an agenda driven by an “expansionist and proselytizing ethos” without any room for conversation/dialogue with the “other” has totalizing and homogenizing tendencies, and thus may be seen as imperialistic.⁴⁷⁷

Although, in India, particularly the missionary education was geared towards the downtrodden—that is, women, Dalits and tribals—it was the higher echelon of the society that primarily benefitted. Christian religious education’s primary purpose was to support government control by maintaining docility. Despite education’s many liberating aspects, it still remained one of the key instruments of domination. Bill Ashcroft et al. explain that “education, whether state or missionary, primary or secondary (and later tertiary) was a massive cannon in the artillery of empire. The military metaphor can however, seem inappropriate, since unlike outright territorial aggression, education effects, in Gramsci’s terms, [a] ‘domination by consent.’”⁴⁷⁸

All of these observations apply readily to the Bodos. In all this, however, while there were many elements animating the interrelationship between empire, education, and evangelism, it was theology that loomed large as a key element. The next sub-section will deal with this in more detail.

⁴⁷⁵ Porter, *Religion*, 316.

⁴⁷⁶ Porter, *Religion*, 316.

⁴⁷⁷ H. C. Brookfield, *Colonialism, Development and Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 3.

⁴⁷⁸ Ashcroft et al., eds., *Post-colonial*, 425.

B. Missionary Education and Theology

Although imperial scholars paid scanty attention to the role of theology in education, religious education, and missional practices, its impact significantly influenced their operation. Coming mainly from Europe initially, and then from North America, Christian religious education programs in the mission fields were primarily influenced by the theology and secular educational practices of the home missions. In most of the mission fields in India a missionary also functioned as pastor and teacher. Seymour and Miller observe that in North America at the close of the twentieth century, there was an increasing focus on an “emergent approach” that emphasized partnership and dialogue between theologians and educators.⁴⁷⁹ According to Seymour and Miller, this “emergent approach” sees theology as simultaneously guiding and guided by Christian religious education. Hence, the tasks of the theologian and the educator cannot be seen as discrete.⁴⁸⁰ There was, they claim, a new effort to ground Christian religious education in theological and educational questions, pointing out the “attempt [by Christian religious educators] to integrate and probe the conversation of those in education and theology about the process by which Christian faith can be embodied, communicated, and re-formed within the culture.”⁴⁸¹ However, as I mentioned earlier, in mission fields, it appears that theology had been already inseparably linked with Christian religious education. Regarding the ways in which theologies impacted education and missional practices in the mission fields, I would like to cite two examples briefly.

My first example is from Andrew Porter’s *Religion Versus Empire? British*

⁴⁷⁹ Jack L. Seymour and Donald E. Miller, eds., *Theological Approaches to Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 250.

⁴⁸⁰ Seymour and Miller, eds., *Theological Approaches*, 250.

⁴⁸¹ Seymour and Miller, eds., *Theological Approaches*, 10.

Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914, which I have referenced already. On the influence of theology on missionary work and education, Porter describes that missionaries “viewed their world first of all with the eyes of faith and then through theological lenses”⁴⁸² that directed and formed missionary movements, initiatives and timing. Missionaries’ theological lenses also formed the view on religious revival, millennium, and biblical interpretation and even influenced the understanding of Roman Catholic and Islamic expansion.⁴⁸³

In his work, Porter shows how a theological shift from the doctrine of election and predestination to justification by faith changed the activities of the British Protestant missions, such as the London Missionary Society (LMS), the Christian Missionary Society (CMS), and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) in the eighteenth century in the United States of America and elsewhere. This theological shift took place, argues Porter, in part due to the ideas developed by late-sixteenth-century Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) and American evangelical theologian Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) and his British followers. This theological shift bolstered a new sense of confidence that ushered in religious revival and a new sense of individual freedom, which developed into what is called Protestant ethics. These Armenian evangelical awakenings encouraged missionary enterprise, giving fresh impetus to the Great Commission “Go ye therefore and teach all nations,” (Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15). It fostered evangelism, benevolent work and optimism among the Protestant churches.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸² Porter, *Religion*, 13.

⁴⁸³ Porter, *Religion*, 13.

⁴⁸⁴ Porter, *Religion*, 32-33.

Due to improved communication and trade, along with a proliferation of knowledge due to what Benedict Anderson calls “print-capitalism,”⁴⁸⁵ the Evangelical Revival and Great Awakening swept across both the Atlantic—i.e., Europe and the North Americas. Porter further shows how, in the eighteenth century, the missionary activities that these shifts inspired became entangled with the European colonial project. Porter quotes Carl Bridenbaugh, who argues “the character of the Society [SPG] was therefore such as to leave no doubt that it represented British imperialism in ecclesiastical guise.”⁴⁸⁶ As to the question of to what extent missionaries were “hand-maids of the empire,” Porter concludes that it was a mutually beneficial arrangement.⁴⁸⁷

My second example comes from Hayden J. A. Bellenoit, whom I have already referenced. In his work, *Missionary Education and Empire in Late Colonial India*, Bellenoit has shown extensively the role of the missionary education enterprise in the development of Indian nationalism and the ways in which Western theology influenced the missionary activities of the LMS, the CMS, and the SPG, particularly with regards to education in north India. Bellenoit argues that “missionaries took their theology seriously,” and it is crucial “to account for theology and how it played out in mission fields” in the arenas of missionary education, the history of religion and even knowledge in South Asia.⁴⁸⁸ In his work, Bellenoit shows that in the mid-nineteenth century there was a shift in the Protestant theology in the West from evangelicalism that emphasized personal justification by faith alone to a theology that was more universal,

⁴⁸⁵ See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

⁴⁸⁶ Porter, *Religion*, 20-21; see also Carl Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Scepter: Transatlantic Faith, Idea, Personalities and Politics, 1689-1775* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 57.

⁴⁸⁷ Porter, *Religion*, 316-330.

⁴⁸⁸ Bellenoit, *Missionary Education*, 7.

humanistic, and sophisticated in its outlook. He points out Western theology had come under the influence of positivist and secular ideals, which greatly shaped the emergence of a more popular theology of fulfillment. It was reflected in a scholarly movement towards comparative religious study and was seen in the production of interreligious discourse, leading to the famous Sanskrit scholar Max Muller's Hibbert Lecture in 1887, where he pointed out the common traits of all religions.

These liberal trends in Protestant thinking became a major influence on missionary educational enterprises. Bellenoit further points out that the "dominant strain of thinking within Protestant missionary circles, by the 1880s, albeit in non-codified form, was that of fulfillment theory," which culminated in John Farquhar's *The Crown of Hinduism*.⁴⁸⁹ The work of Farquhar and others became a significant component of missionary educational enterprises and helped in confirming, consolidating, and articulating missionaries' stand on fulfillment theory. Farquhar's work attempted to connect Christianity with other religious systems and tried to "prove that Christianity was the ultimate progeny of the world's cornucopia of faiths."⁴⁹⁰ In this theological shift, which was undoubtedly influenced by Darwin's theory of evolution, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Shamanism were not considered false but aspirants of truth that is displayed most fully within and fulfilled by Christianity. Bellenoit notes that missionary education enterprises driven by this theology ushered in the development of constructive nationalism in India through the formation of affective knowledge, a knowledge that appreciates other religions.⁴⁹¹ After this, missionary educationists such as William Holland, Edward Oakley, and Durant tried to engage what they considered the

⁴⁸⁹ Bellenoit, *Missionary Education*, 28.

⁴⁹⁰ Bellenoit, *Missionary Education*, 28.

⁴⁹¹ Bellenoit, *Missionary Education*, 8-9.

“admirable characteristics” of Indian cultures and morality in their educational endeavors.⁴⁹²

The above two examples show how theology shaped various missionary activities and educational enterprise, both religious and secular in two different periods. While Porter’s example shows how the evangelical revival in England wrought massive changes in the North Americas in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Bellenoit’s example shows how a shift in Protestant theology in the mid-nineteenth century changed the way missionaries approached other religions and educational policies in India.

However, it would be erroneous to assume that all Protestant churches in the West were influenced by this new liberal trend of theology that Bellenoit has mentioned. Many independent churches, particularly some Baptist groups, maintained a more rigorously individualistic and anticultural outlook, including the Baptist General Conference, the home mission of the NBBCA. If English literature was intended to play the role of surrogate colonial rulers in the colonial project, then it was theology that played the role of surrogate missionaries in the post-missionary era for the NBBCA. Bellenoit’s main argument is that missionary education in India produced affective knowledge and ushered in developing a spirit of nationalism that propelled independent movement among the educated Indians. Thus he refutes the notion that the missionaries were “handmaids of the empire”⁴⁹³ and that their educational enterprises helped only to promote its interests. However, he also points out that the missionaries thought that promotion of affective knowledge that led to eventual nationalism would serve their own missional agenda, “as sympathy to tilt towards Indian nationalism would benefit their evangelical

⁴⁹² Bellenoit, *Missionary Education*, 85.

⁴⁹³ Bellenoit, *Missionary Education*, 6-7.

causes...[because most] of India's future, dominant political class, as both missionaries and British administrators were aware, would be English educated."⁴⁹⁴ How and in what way their expectations were met is a different matter altogether.

Given the ambiguities of empire, education, and mission, and the various theologies of different eras, it is challenging to evaluate the primary goals of missionary education. Among many, two prominent goals of missionary education were to spread the good news of Jesus Christ (salvific) and to serve the people (social action).

C. Christian Mission and Education

Although some historians may not agree, the most important contributions of missionary work, apart from in the areas of health and social service, was to education, mainly through the schools and colleges they established in mission fields. And it must also be noted that if there was any universally accepted function of missionary education, it was *preparatio evangelica*. Education was designed to be the *preparatio evangelica*, considered an instrument for bringing the Kingdom of God to heathen lands.⁴⁹⁵

Educational institutions served as a convenient context for preaching to all people. The missionary educational enterprises in the colonial period developed into ideals about universal education. To that end, a system was set up in India by William Carey, the English founder of the movement for universal education, who supervised the establishment of 126 mission schools and a college.⁴⁹⁶ Hluna points out that the "real purpose of missionary educational work is not merely to educate, nor merely to remove

⁴⁹⁴ Bellenoit, *Missionary Education*, 155.

⁴⁹⁵ Hluna, *Education*, 50.

⁴⁹⁶ Hluna, *Education*, 49.

obstacles and break down barriers but to win pupils to Christ.”⁴⁹⁷ Quoting John Murdoch, Bellenoit mentions that missionaries continually asserted that mission schools that carried out both religious and secular education were “intended to be engine[s] of conversion to Christianity.”⁴⁹⁸ In addition to conversion, the educational institutions established by the missionaries also sought to train converts to become intelligent leaders in the church. Hluna points out that the training of children and youth for leadership in the church and community is one of the essential aims of missionary education.⁴⁹⁹

It was not, however, only education that was considered *preparatio evangelica*; the study of other religions was considered to be so as well. Bellenoit quotes Charlie Andrew, an adherent of fulfillment theory, who says “we shall find a true *preparatio evangelica* in the Vedas and Upanishads...as well as in the tradition of Muhammed, the utterance of the Sufi mystics, the sayings of Kabir, and the verses of the Granth.”⁵⁰⁰ A colonial logic of displacement lingers in this expression of fulfillment theory, which views other religions as lesser forms of religion destined to be completed by Christianity.

The complex issues here illustrate the ambiguous relationship between empire, education, and mission, particularly between theology and education. Such ambiguities become more pronounced when we consider the traditional approach to Christian religious education and its relation with alien cultures in missionary contexts. The next section will examine how missionaries understood the matter of culture in relation to Christian religious education in the Bodo context.

⁴⁹⁷ Hluna, *Education*, 49-50.

⁴⁹⁸ Bellenoit, *Missionary Education*, 74.

⁴⁹⁹ Hluna, *Education*, 49-50.

⁵⁰⁰ Bellenoit, *Missionary Education*, 67.

II. Traditional/Countercultural Approach/Model of Christian Religious Education in the Bodo Context

In the previous section I discussed the historical context of Christian religious education in Bodo churches. I explored how Christian religious education of mission fields was closely connected with the theological and secular education perspectives of home missions as a strategic part of civilizing mission in the colonial project. This section deals with the current approach to Christian religious education operative in Bodo churches, which can be termed as “traditional approach/model.” This approach is basically based on what Bevans calls “countercultural model of contextual theology”⁵⁰¹ and therefore it can be also called “countercultural approach of Christian religious education.” In what follows, I analyze the traditional or countercultural approach/model of Christian religious education in Bodo context with Bevans’ “countercultural model of contextual theology.”

During the colonial period in India, it was the missionaries who carried out Christian religious education among the native population. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, missional cultural engagement can best be described as “countercultural,” that is, directed against Bodo culture via missional strategies to impart Christian values and practices. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, a less antagonistic form of cultural engagement occurred. In each period, however, because of the complex relationship between Christian religious education and the mission approach of each home mission it is impossible to collectively describe this education as either “liberal” or “evangelical.” Even so, a more liberal approach (yet equally colonial) from the mid-nineteenth century onward generally aimed to engage the “admirable

⁵⁰¹ Bevans, *Models*, 117-137.

characteristics of Indian culture and morality,”⁵⁰² while the earlier countercultural approach—which I discussed from Porter’s example in the previous section—still continued among evangelical groups through the twentieth century and is still practiced today. I will focus here on the earlier approach because of its lingering effect on Bodo Christianity.

The various attitudes and approaches to education in the eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth centuries were all in agreement regarding the way Indian cultures were looked upon. Despite the writings of the Orientalists, both missionaries and colonial administrators looked upon Indian culture and particularly Hinduism as a bundle of superstitions and magic. Hinduism was considered antithetical to scientific rationalism and the spirit of scientific inquiry. Scottish missionary Alexander Duff writing in 1839 called Hinduism “a stupendous system of error.”⁵⁰³ This attitude helped shape the Western perception of Indian cultures. Missionaries did not perceive much contradiction between rationalism and the precepts of Christianity. They assumed that “awakening to reason, rather than the more provocative strategy of direct conversion, would itself lead to the undermining of the superstition that made up of Hinduism.”⁵⁰⁴ Chakrabarty quotes Michael Laird, who says that apart “from genuine desire to advance learning for its own sake, the missionaries also believed that western science would undermine belief in the Hindu scriptures; the new geography, for example, could hardly be reconciled with the *Puranas*...thus [they] acted as instigators of an intellectual awakening, or even revolution, ...[and their] schools were obvious agents of such a Christian

⁵⁰² Bellenoit, *Missionary Education*, 85.

⁵⁰³ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 200), 24.

⁵⁰⁴ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing*, 24.

enlightenment.”⁵⁰⁵ Even the very act of mastering English, wrote Alexander Duff, was believed able to make “the student...*tenfold less* the child of Pantheism, idolatry and superstition than before.”⁵⁰⁶ In northeast India missionary activities were thus aimed at twin goals, first converting the locals from their animistic traditional religions as well as protecting them from the influence of superstitious Hinduism.

This traditional approach, which is countercultural, treats culture with a good deal of suspicion. Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, who worked as a missionary in India for decades, suggests that if the gospel is to truly take root in a person’s context/culture it needs to challenge and purify that context/culture, such that “it will call radically into question that way of understanding embodied in the language it uses . . . [involving] contradiction, and call for conversion, for a radical *metanoia*, a U-turn of the mind.”⁵⁰⁷ During the earlier period of countercultural missionary activities in India, educational models followed suit and were generally *anticultural* in practice.⁵⁰⁸ While the countercultural model of theology, and by extension education, may aim in cases to view context/culture with respect and sympathy, it sees the gospel as the decisive factor. In this approach gospel must “take the lead” in processes of cultural engagement so that “the context is shaped and formed by the reality of the gospel,”⁵⁰⁹ which inevitably turns out to be an anticultural approach.

Richard Niebuhr, in his classic work *Christ and Culture*, describes five theological postures depicting Christianity’s relationship with culture/context: “Christ

⁵⁰⁵ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing*, 24.

⁵⁰⁶ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing*, 24.

⁵⁰⁷ Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (London: SPCK, 1986), 5-6.

⁵⁰⁸ Bevans, *Models*, 125.

⁵⁰⁹ Bevans, *Models*, 125.

against culture,” “Christ of culture,” “Christ above culture,” “Christ and culture in paradox,” and “Christ the transformer of culture.”⁵¹⁰ The countercultural model of contextual theology is not inherently anticultural, but it has a tendency to turn out to be so. Thus, Christian religious education based on it generally falls under Niebuhr’s rubric, “Christ against culture.” This theological posture assumes the world and human cultures are enemies of the gospel, considering everything that is in them to be evil. Taking cues from Gerhard Lohfink’s description of the Christian church as a “contrast community,” some practitioners refer to this model as the contrast model of theology.⁵¹¹ Accordingly, Christian religious education based on this model disseminates contrasting images among the communities of different faiths, particularly emphasizing the contrasting images between Christian communities and communities of other faiths. The countercultural model of Christian religious education constructs binary oppositions between Christians and other faith communities. Historically, such binaries include children of light (*srangni fisa*)/children of darkness (*khwmsini fisa*), saved (*basaijanai*)/unsaved (*basaijawai*) and chosen ones (*saikhojanai*)/unchosen ones (*saikhojawai*). These contrasting images are still in vogue in most of the Bodo churches. Christian religious education based on this approach to contextual theology regards context/culture as of lesser importance since it is “both a natural ally as well as a natural foe of the gospel.”⁵¹² The following points unpack some of the key elements of the countercultural model of Christian religious education.

⁵¹⁰ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1951), 45-218.

⁵¹¹ Bevans, *Models*, 119; see also Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of Christian Faith*, trans. John Galvin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

⁵¹² Bevans, *Models*, 119. See also Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 4-5.

A. Primary Goal

The primary goal of the countercultural model of Christian religious education is conversion. This model is Christocentric, and teachings based on it emphatically emphasize allegiance and loyalty to the absolute lordship of Christ. It demands a personal relationship with Christ of every individual, and teaches that salvation is achieved through Christ alone. Every teaching is geared towards its ultimate goal of conversion.

B. Place of Scripture and Tradition

In the countercultural model of Christian religious education, scripture and church traditions become the determining factors in articulating and interpreting faith and human experiences. This model draws its scriptural resources mainly from the Gospel of John, 1 John 2:15 (“do not love the world or the things in the world”), Romans 12:2 (“do not conform yourself to this age”), 1 Corinthians 1:23 (“we preach Christ crucified—a stumbling block to Jews, and foolishness to the Greeks”), and 1 Peter 1:1 (where Peter calls Christians “resident aliens”).⁵¹³ It draws heavily on Tertullian, whose famous dictum “What does Athens [human culture/context] have to do with Jerusalem [gospel]?” becomes its basis. It also takes inspiration from *The Teachings of the Twelve*, *The Shepherd of Hermes*, *The Epistle of Barnabas*, and *The Epistle of Clement*.⁵¹⁴ Other examples of this approach include *The Letter to the Diognetus* (Christians are in the world but not of the world),⁵¹⁵ the practice of monasticism, the powerful witness of the Anabaptist movement, and the vigorous examples of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹³ Bevens, *Models*, 118; see also Niebuhr, *Christ*, 45-48.

⁵¹⁴ Niebuhr, *Christ*, 49.

⁵¹⁵ Bevens, *Models*, 118.

⁵¹⁶ Bevens, *Models*, 118.

C. Historical Foundation

This model views human history from a biblical perspective and its teachings support the notion of “grand narrative.” Christ is the lord of history; it is in fact his-story. Central to this model is a certain understanding of the nature of revelation and its role in human history. Bevans notes, again drawing on the work of Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, that in this view the gospel is not essentially the “disclosure of eternal truths” but instead is the “total fact of Christ.”⁵¹⁷ Here the term “fact” is understood in the sense of a Latin *factum*, meaning something has been done. The fact of Christ (his incarnation, deeds, death and resurrection) suggests that all human and cosmic history is taken up by revelation. Human experiences, contexts/cultures, and history have to be measured by this fact, and the future must be measured by it. So while this model claims that Christianity is an historical religion based on historical facts, it privileges itself with the right to interpret history in light of the gospel or the Christ event. Pedagogues thus employ the hermeneutics of historicization of faith discussed in the third chapter, under which non-biblical faiths are considered non-historical, mythological absurdities, and amatory trifles. This formulation of history supports the idea of a master grand narrative, the Christian narrative colluding with the European colonial narrative as “sovereign subject, indeed sovereign and Subject [*sic*]”⁵¹⁸ of History, and subsequently the development of what postcolonial critics call “singular ethics.” As it played out in India, this understanding of history was not merely ecclesiastical and epistemological, but also political.⁵¹⁹ There were strong links between the understanding of history and imperialism in Western

⁵¹⁷ Bevans, *Models*, 12.

⁵¹⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique on Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* (London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 200.

⁵¹⁹ Young, *White Mythologies*, 7-12.

epistemology in both religious and secular domains.⁵²⁰

D. Content of Teachings

In the countercultural model of Christian religious education, scripture and tradition play a pivotal role, though often through epistemologically violent means of communicating. Content has primacy over context; and biblical texts serve as the lens through which context/culture and human experiences are interpreted in a unilateral process aimed at conversion. That is, teaching and learning proceed from particular biblical texts as understood by a particular ecclesiastical and theological tradition. This model also employs hermeneutics of textualization (as discussed in Chapter Three) and consequently it privileges textuality over orality in privileging content over context/culture and experience. Textualization—in the form of scripture, tradition, and teaching materials produced under the purview of the ecclesiastical, cultural, and theological tradition of the sending mission/church—becomes the basis for learning. The construction of text or discourse, a type of truth construction, is mediated through settled meanings of spirituality and Christian life. These settled meanings purport to be “revelation” but actually serve as masked mediations of colonial power of the sending church/mission. Thus socially and culturally constructed texts and theological discourses turned out to be taxonomies modulating and controlling human agency and intentionality.

E. Critique

Practitioners of this type of Christian religious education, based on countercultural model of contextual theology, claim that its rootedness in scripture and tradition help to

⁵²⁰ Young, *White Mythologies*, 7-12.

demonstrate that “the genius of Christianity lies neither in the endorsement of the status quo nor in its cultivation of the ‘new and the next’ but in its challenging and transforming power.”⁵²¹ They claim that it plays a prophetic role by exposing the anti-gospel elements of a context/culture, including in Western Culture—for example, on the basis of Gospel values, it opposes individualism, unlimited choice, an emphasis on having over being, the evils of school violence, an unstable family life, sexual promiscuity, and the unchecked use of natural resources. It challenges humanity with its sign of God’s “No” to the world in favor of God’s deeper word of “Yes.” This means it challenges students to denounce the anti-gospel elements of a context/culture and to grow in the deeper knowledge of God so that church can be an instrument and a foretaste of the kingdom of God, a replica of the “new heaven and new earth” that is yet to come.⁵²²

However, as has been pointed out, the countercultural model has a tendency to become *anticultural*. Not only does this shun mutual dialogue with others, it also tends toward a totalizing vision that assimilates differences into homogeneity under the guise of Christian unity. Lacking self-critical awareness, its teachings threaten to make the church insular, a defensive, inward looking and centripetal force ghettoizing itself rather than being involved in the world. The approach also masks its own privilege. Bevans points out that, with a few exceptions, the adherents of countercultural contextual theology are white [Western] and middle-class. They are unaware of how their social location plays a role in their theologizing and how this unwittingly promotes monoculturalism. Hence, overall, the countercultural approach leans towards exclusivism, as displayed through

⁵²¹ Bevans, *Models*, 124; see also Alan J. Roxburgh, “The Church in a Postmodern Context” in Graig van Gelder, ed., *Confident Witness, Changing World: Rediscovering the Gospel in North America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 242.

⁵²² Bevans, *Models*, 124-125.

concepts like “resident alien,” “contrast community,” and “colony of heaven.” It is, thus in danger of making the church insular, parochial, and resistant to new ideas.⁵²³

With the above account in mind, it is possible to understand some of the challenges facing contemporary Bodo Christian communities, and more, to mark out a pathway forward toward transforming Christian religious education in Bodo communities. First, however, I turn to address some major contemporary religious education approaches to provide a broader context for envisioning alternative possibilities.

III. An Analysis of Major Christian Religious Education Theories with Contextual Theologies

In this section I will analyze the major approaches/models of Christian religious education in light of the models of contextual theology put forth by Stephen Bevans. Here, with regards to Christian religious education, I am using the terms “approach” and “model” interchangeably. In the field of Christian religious education theory and practice, scholars have identified five major models of Christian religious education (which are not mutually exclusive and final, but substantive): the religious instruction model, faith community model, spiritual development model, liberation model, and interpretation model.⁵²⁴ I shall analyze four of these major models of Christian religious education from the perspectives of three of Bevans’ models of contextual theology—that is, in relation to the translation model, the anthropological model and the praxis model. I will discuss the spiritual development approach/model in terms of development theory because it has

⁵²³ Bevans, *Models*, 125-126.

⁵²⁴ Seymour and Miller, eds., *Contemporary Approaches*, 11-34.

more bearings with the development paradigm. I have already discussed the countercultural model in the previous section. I will not be addressing Bevans' transcendental model, for it is not directly relevant to educational context in Bodo culture.⁵²⁵ In one of their five recommendations for future Christian educational programs, Seymour and Miller suggest exploring the foundational relationships between Christian education and both educational theory and theology. In their following work, *Theological Approaches to Christian Education*,⁵²⁶ they attempted to identify connections between theology and Christian religious education and insisted that any such work should continuously move towards these connections.

Although Bevans is never directly mentioned as a contributor to either *Contemporary Approaches to Christian Education* or *Theological Approaches to Christian Education*, there are corresponding theological terms that can be used to bring them into conversation. It is therefore appropriate to analyze these Christian religious education models in light of the contextual theologies highlighted by Bevans for two primary reasons. First, as Bevans uses context and culture almost synonymously in his work, his analysis of culture in relation to faith from a theological perspective helps crystallize the analysis of culture in relation to major theories of Christian religious education. Second, the attempt to analyze the links between contextual theologies and major Christian religious education approaches—with their resultant views on context/culture, content, and theology—assists in positioning these theories in an Indian context as these approaches/models are taught in Indian theological colleges. I will also try to account for postcolonial/postmodern sensibilities, which will set the stage for the

⁵²⁵ Bevans, *Models*, 103-116.

⁵²⁶ Jack L. Seymour and Donald E. Miller, eds., *Theological Approaches to Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).

fifth chapter.

No extensive analytical work has been done on the major models of Christian religious education in light of contextual theologies. To focus the discussion here, my examination will be confined to the work of Bevans and Seymour and Miller in the four sub-sections on connections and influences: 1) translation model of contextual theology in relation to the instruction approach/model and interpretation approach/model of Christian religious education; 2) the anthropological model of contextual theology in relation to the faith community approach/model of Christian religious education; 3) praxis model of contextual theology in relation to the liberation approach/model of Christian religious education, and; 4) development theory on the spiritual development approach/model of Christian religious education. In this fourth sub-section I depart from Bevans and instead use development theory to analyze the notion of spiritual development. Each sub-section will briefly discuss the model of contextual theology, followed by the approach/model of Christian religious education and a discussion how the former has influenced or impacted the latter. The goal of all these analyses is to explore how these connections and influences can help shed light on Bodo practices, and in the process, show how contextual theologies and approaches to Christian religious education are interrelated without being conflated.

My analysis and critique of major Christian education theories is confined to broad approaches/models rather on a particular author/scholar or theorists. Therefore, the view of a particular author or theorist may not be reflected in this analysis. Further, my grouping of various Christian education theorists or authors in different approaches or

models is based on the works of Seymour and Miller.⁵²⁷ That said, authors might have more than one position in their approaches to Christian religious education. This is why I have chosen to use a broad typology, thus critically framing the views of a wide range of thinkers.

A. The Translation Model and the Religious Instruction and Interpretation

Approach/Model

The translation model of contextual theology has unique bearing on Christian religious education, as can be seen in relation to the instruction and the interpretation models/approaches of Christian religious education.

1. Translation Model of Contextual Theology

The translation model of contextual theology is the most commonly employed and is the oldest way of theologizing contextually. Its practitioners claim that it is found within the Bible itself. Pope John Paul II, citing the speeches of the apostle Paul at Lystra and Athens (Acts 14:15-17 and 17:22-31) writes that his speeches are “an example of the inculturation of the Gospel.”⁵²⁸ Bevans discusses two prominent practitioners of this model: Pope John Paul II is one; the other is David J. Hesselgrave, a major spokesperson for the evangelical tradition of theology.⁵²⁹ The model draws its inspiration from the practice of biblical translation, in which an attempt is made to find dynamic equivalence to the original meaning of biblical terms in the Hebrew and Greek texts vis-à-vis another

⁵²⁷ For groupings of various authors/theorists in a particular approach/model, see Seymour and Miller, eds., *Contemporary Approaches*.

⁵²⁸ Bevans, *Models*, 37.

⁵²⁹ Bevans, *Models*, 45.

language and culture, in turn, utilizing such equivalence effectively in Christian religious education. Following Charles H. Kroft,⁵³⁰ Bevens says that the task of the translation model is to apply the concept of dynamic equivalence to the task of theologizing, particularly in translating the meanings of church doctrines. The theory suggests that though the specific words are different, the meaning should be retained across the translation.

The translation model emphasizes the adequate communication of the “gospel core” or “naked gospel.”⁵³¹ It maintains that the basic message of Christianity is unchanging and supracultural or supracontextual. A basic metaphor used for this model is that of the kernel and husk, where, the kernel of the gospel is surrounded by the disposable and non-essential cultural husk.⁵³² That is, an original meaning must always be expressed in terms that fit within the new audience’s context/culture. In a way, this amounts to employing theology as an act of cultural translation of meanings and symbols, finding appropriate analogues in a new language to transmit clearly what another language already understands as meaningful. The stress, however, is on retaining the original meaning in an undistorted way and without permutation. Meaningful translation thus involves extracting this essential message and re-contextualizing it for the listener, an act that plays out fundamentally colonialist dynamics, in which the speaker’s meaning must be prioritized and preserved. In this model context/culture plays an ancillary role and thus “gospel content affects cultural and social context.”⁵³³

⁵³⁰ Charles H. Kroft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 269, 295-96.

⁵³¹ Bevens, *Models*, 40.

⁵³² Bevens, *Models*, 40-41.

⁵³³ Bevens, *Models*, 40.

2. Religious Instruction Approach/Model

The main concerns of the religious instruction approach/model of Christian religious education are based on three basic premises. First, the proponents and adherents of religious instruction approach, such as J. M. Gregory, James Michael Lee, and Sara P. Little argue that the main task of Christian religious education is to instruct learners through “transmission of Christian religious beliefs, practices, feelings, knowledge and effects to the learners.”⁵³⁴ Little proposes three presuppositions of the religious instruction approach: 1) education is more comprehensive than instruction, 2) instruction should not be equated with schooling and 3) religious instruction is only one of the functions of religious community. Despite these presuppositions she emphasizes the importance of instruction unambiguously by saying: “There is more to the teaching ministry than religious instruction but religious instruction is at the heart of the teaching.”⁵³⁵

Second, proponents of this model rely heavily on the methodologies of social science theory and other secular education theories and the humanities. Lee, a prominent advocate for this method, argues that in terms of methods of teaching and learning, religious education is not fundamentally different from secular education.⁵³⁶ Furthermore, Lee argues that religious education is a social science rather than a sub-discipline of theology, and therefore its methodology should be derived from developmental, sociological, and educational theories to facilitate transmission of the gospel truths to the learners, where the role of translation comes to play out. Lee’s works, *The Shape of*

⁵³⁴ Seymour and Millers, eds., *Contemporary Approaches*, 16.

⁵³⁵ Sara P. Little, “Religious Instruction” in Seymour and Miller, eds., *Contemporary Approaches*, 35-52.

⁵³⁶ James Michael Lee, *The Flow of Religious Instruction: A Social Science Approach* (Mishawaka, Ind.: Religious Education Press, 1973), 269.

Religious Instruction (1971), *The Flow of Religious Instruction* (1973), and *The Content of Religious Instruction* (1985), are based on a “Social Science Approach.”⁵³⁷ They demonstrate a clear influence of social science theories of 1960s and 1970s, a period in which objectivity and empiricism were highly prized and praised by Western academia. It was the period in which quantitative analysis gained prominence over qualitative analysis, even in research on Christian religious education. Little, on the other hand, emphasizes the inevitable role of theology in the transmission of religious truths, meanings and doctrines in the activity of instruction to the learners on ethical grounds.⁵³⁸

Third, the religious instruction approach/model depends on the famous dictum of “faith seeking understanding,” with key emphasis on the functions of understanding, deciding and believing. Following March Belth, Little says primary ingredients of understanding involve, first stimulating thinking or to arousing a thought process in the learners to do something with the information he/she receives after instruction. This leads one to interpret the meaning of experience and to order information gained through instruction for himself/herself and ultimately to use one’s thinking process in poetic imagination.⁵³⁹ Further, following Stephen Toulmin’s philosophical category, Little claims that the powers of human thought or thinking process operates through a particular “conceptual inheritance,” which she calls “intellectual ecology,” and it directs understanding and is done intentionally. Thus intentionality becomes key attribute in shaping understanding. Another ingredient of thinking involves understanding what is true. That understanding must lead to deciding what is true and ultimately to believing it

⁵³⁷ James Michael Lee, *The Shape of Religious Education: A Social Science Approach* (Mishawaka Ind.: Religious Education Press, 1971).

⁵³⁸ Little, “Religious Instruction,” 42.

⁵³⁹ Little, “Religious Instruction,” 43.

with “openness and conviction.”⁵⁴⁰ However, in all these processes instruction is key. We can see primarily three major influences of the translation model in connection with the instruction approach/model in the Indian context. First, the colonial legacy is evident in the way the religious educational enterprise was grounded in the dynamics of cultural translation. The impact of cultural translation as a colonial legacy had far reaching consequences on theology and religious education. Seymour and Miller show how in the 1860s J. M. Gregory argued that the main tool of Christian religious education—Sunday school—was not an “isolated and eccentric movement of human benevolence.” Gregory saw Sunday school as a religious part of the “great movement of the age” in the overall school system of the world that was marshalling “the forces of civilized peoples and governments for the education of the rising generations.”⁵⁴¹ Gregory viewed religious education as an integral part of a civilizing mission in accordance with the colonial educational project of the period and its goal of social transformation (i.e. control).

Second, as a result of colonial legacy, we have seen the massive production and dissemination of texts/discourse and translation of those texts/discourses in other languages/cultures in order to transmit religious truths and doctrines to the learners, thus orienting toward a content-centered teaching/learning. For example, this process in India occurred in the CEEFI (Christian Education Department, Evangelical Fellowship of India,) up to the twentieth century, by which Sunday school materials were adapted to the Indian context from Gospel Light International, an American group. These Sunday school materials were translated into several regional languages, including Assamese. The

⁵⁴⁰ Little, “Religious Instruction,” 45-48.

⁵⁴¹ Seymour and Millers, eds., *Contemporary Approaches*, 17; see also J. M. Gregory, “The Future of Sunday School,” *The Sunday School Teacher*, 2 (June 1867), 173.

materials feature a fifteen-year cycle of education that promises to cover the whole Bible four times.⁵⁴² It is a testament to the importance placed on content-centered teaching/learning by translating religious lessons to transmit through instruction for Christian identity formation.

Third, we see the influence of the translation model joined with an instruction model on the question of “original meanings.” The main goal of the instruction model is to convey the “original meanings” that are constructed in the Christian religious education in the Western context so they can be applied in new social contexts, essentially the equivalent of translation model. Religious instruction makes an attempt on learners to understand and internalize certain beliefs, doctrines, practices, and feelings through those “original meanings” that are constructed in a different context/culture.

3. Interpretation Approach/Model

The task of the interpretation model of Christian religious education is to examine the relationship between scripture and life experiences.⁵⁴³ This model understands human life as a meaning-making process on the part of the learners. The task of the teacher is to enable the learner, who is in search of meaning in life, to construct a meaningful narrative. Accordingly, Christian religious education aims to help learners make meaning in light of the revelation of God in Christ and to live faithfully in accordance with that

⁵⁴² The CEEFI materials translated from Gospel Light Internationals from the year 1953 onwards is the example of cultural translation. In my Master of Theology dissertation I did content analysis of CEEFI Christian education literatures (three courses each for students and teachers from junior, intermediate and senior). These Sunday School materials are translated and produced without the consideration of local cultural contexts. See Shyam K. Basumatary, “Content Analysis” in unpublished M. Th. thesis “Problems of Adolescents in Select Congregation of Darrang Baptist Christian Association and their implication for Christian Education” (United Theological College, Bangalore, 2000), 101-128.

⁵⁴³ Seymour and Wehrheim, “Faith Seeking Understanding: Interpretation as a Task of Christian Education” in Seymour and Miller, eds., *Contemporary Approaches*, 123-143.

meaning. Practitioners of this model include William Clayton Brown, Thomas Groome, Douglas Weigeer, Jack L. Seymour, and Carol A. Wehrheim. Assisted by the philosophical and biblical hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur and Raimundo Panikkar, Seymour and Wehrheim suggest that there are three types of hermeneutics at work in this model. The first is morphological hermeneutics, by which the present is understood in light of the past, through cultural inheritances passed down through generations. The second is diachronical hermeneutics, by which an attempt is made to translate and understand the meaning of a written text in its historical context. The third is diatropical hermeneutics, in which an attempt is made to understand another culture from its own perspective, which requires patient listening and dialogue. When it comes to the application of this hermeneutical theory to Christian religious education, Seymour and Wehrheim call on educators to translate the meanings of “Christian culture” for the uninitiated, to make them understand the applicability of “Christian text” today, and to communicate those meanings so that “other cultures” may see the “life-transforming power” of the gospel of Jesus Christ.⁵⁴⁴

In all, Seymour and Wehrheim maintain that the purpose of interpretation is to find meaning in the “Christ event,” which is “true beyond history, language, and interpretation.”⁵⁴⁵ This reflects the translation model’s assumption that the gospel core is unchanging and supracultural in origin, which must be extracted and conveyed in different contexts. The interpretation model also relies on the dictum “faith seeking understanding” but aims to translate the dictum in a more significant manner: “I believe,

⁵⁴⁴ Seymour and Wehrheim, “Faith Seeking,” 129-130.

⁵⁴⁵ Seymour and Wehrheim, “Faith Seeking,” 130.

or I participate fully in order that I might understand.”⁵⁴⁶ This means understanding is preceded by the experience of being made new, of being “born again.”⁵⁴⁷

The basic influence of assumptions behind the translation model on the interpretation approach/model lies in the goal of “translation of meanings” from the unchanging message of the gospel⁵⁴⁸ in the “meaning-making” of various truths in the process of encountering human life: the world, other persons, the other culture and from the transcendent.⁵⁴⁹ While the key goal of the translation model is to translate the meanings of the gospel/text/discourses with idiomatic and dynamic equivalence, the task of the interpretation approach/model is to teach those meanings in life situations in different cultures/contexts. Seymour and Wehrheim point out that while Thomas Groome refers to the use of different theological orientations as the basis for interpretation in meaning making as “shared Christian praxis,” Douglas Wingeier, from an evangelical tradition, calls it “faith translation”⁵⁵⁰ in tune with the translation model.

4. Critique

We have explored the connections between the translation model of contextual theology and both the instruction and interpretation approaches/models of Christian religious education. I am evaluating both models of Christian religious education in light of the translation model of contextual theology because, like the translation model, they both

⁵⁴⁶ Seymour and Wehrheim, “Faith Seeking,” 130; see also Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), 103-127.

⁵⁴⁷ Seymour and Wehrheim, “Faith Seeking,” 130.

⁵⁴⁸ Bevans, *Models*, 37.

⁵⁴⁹ Seymour and Wehrheim, “Faith Seeking,” 123- 143.

⁵⁵⁰ See Jack L. Seymour, “Approaches to Christian Education” in Seymour and Miller, *Contemporary Approaches*, 29-31. In his essay Seymour groups Groome in the *Interpretation Approach*. Groome argues that “meaning making” should take place through shared praxis and emerge from the context, which is a better approach.

take the gospel message/content seriously and thus put more emphasis on Christian identity than on contextual reality or cultural identity.⁵⁵¹ Accordingly, the religious instruction model of Christian religious education, with emphasis on Christian identity, tends to be more content-centered than learner-centered in order to maintain Christian identity, deemphasizing cultural identity. Contents of religious text/discourses are privileged over human cultures and experiences as a theological foundation because, as the translation model suggests, these contextual realities are ambiguous and unreliable.⁵⁵² As a result, the religious instruction model pays serious attention to the application of religious teachings in the life of the learners in the teaching process for Christian identity.⁵⁵³ However, there is an established hierarchy, with the instructor placed firmly above the instructed, education is conceived generally as a “one-way process.”⁵⁵⁴ In the instruction model, instruction is considered as “the process by and through which learning is caused in an individual in one way or another.”⁵⁵⁵ It is the instructor who causes learning in the learner.

While Little describes learners as human beings who are worthy of respect and dignity and born with natural curiosity and wonder but in need of gospel, a learner’s role is not spelt out clearly. The role of learners seems to be as minimal; they function as passive consumers of information doled out. This reflects what Paulo Freire calls the “banking concept” of education, in which teachers are “depositors” and students are

⁵⁵¹ Bevens, *Models*, 42.

⁵⁵² Bevens, *Models*, 42.

⁵⁵³ Seymour and Miller, eds., *Contemporary Approaches*, 32-33.

⁵⁵⁴ Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran, *Reshaping Religious Education* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 17.

⁵⁵⁵ James Michael Lee, *The Shape of Religious Instruction: A Social Science Approach* (Mishawaka, Indiana: Religious Education Press, 1971), 8.

“depositories.”⁵⁵⁶ In this concept, students are seen as depositories of knowledge, patterns, and values, and teachers are depositors who cannot help but fail to give students tools with which to shape their own realities. Freire instead emphasizes the notion of students as “subjects” of learning, particularly in adult education.⁵⁵⁷ While a content-centered instruction model of Christian religious education has led to massive production and widespread dissemination of texts of spiritual knowledge, it gives little consideration to cultural differences and tends not to see students as “subjects” of their own experiences.

The interpretation model on the other hand, even while it takes more seriously the learner’s meaning-making, tends also to be content-centered because it also has a tendency to emphasize the question of “original meaning.” Although the interpretation model makes a serious attempt to connect Christian faith and the present activity of God to human experiences, it suffers when attempting real theological reflection on these experiences.⁵⁵⁸ The interpretation model, working essentially with an orientation of translation model of contextual theology, makes a rigorous attempt to illuminate what it calls the original meaning(s) of biblical texts and religious texts but it fails to address the role of history and socio-politico-cultural contexts in the shaping of those original meanings and in the reception of them in contemporary contexts.

A major flaw in the translation model of contextual theology is its tendency to assume that “every culture is roughly similar to every other culture.”⁵⁵⁹ Therefore, there is a tendency to view God’s revelation as a message that can be received similarly in

⁵⁵⁶ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: The Seabury Press, 1970), 57-61.

⁵⁵⁷ See Freire, *Pedagogy*, Chapter Two.

⁵⁵⁸ Seymour and Miller, eds., *Contemporary Approaches*, 32-33.

⁵⁵⁹ Bevans, *Models*, 43.

human cultures. However, revelation is not just a message from God or lists of truths that are to be preserved, believed and transmitted by teaching from one culture to other cultures, but rather is the manifestation of God's presence in a particular human history and society.⁵⁶⁰ The instruction and interpretation models of Christian religious education, influenced by a translation model of contextual theology, also have a similar tendency. But the task of Christian religious education is not just to communicate ready-made contents (doctrines) that must be transmitted, learned and memorized. Rather, its task is to teach God's ongoing encounter with human beings in a particular time, history and society through the web of human culture(s).

The shared goals of the translation model with instruction and interpretation approaches/models evoke Spivak's thoughts on imperialism: "If the project Imperialism is violently to put together the episteme that will 'mean' (for others) and 'know' (for the self) the colonial subject as history's nearly-served other, the example of these deletions indicate explicitly what is always implicit: that meaning intersects power."⁵⁶¹ In other words, in the process of seeking original meaning and meaning making, there are always intersections of power between the knowledge of the knower (the self/subject/teacher) and the meaning of knowledge to another (the other/object/learner). Colonial Christian religious education took the approach that what the missionaries knew was meant for the native (the other), who did not know, and therefore any religious education that perpetuates such an attitude is still fundamentally imperialistic.

⁵⁶⁰ Bevans, *Models*, 44.

⁵⁶¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Rani of Sirmur," in Francis Baker et al., eds., *Europe and Its Others: Proceedings of the Essex Conference*, July, vol. 1 (Colchester: University of Essex, 1985), 134; see also G. C. Spivak, *Critique*, 215.

B. The Anthropological Model and the Faith Community Approach/Model

In this sub-section I shall analyze the anthropological model of contextual theology and compare with the faith community model/approach of Christian religious education, showing how elements of the former have influenced the latter, concluding with a critical analysis.

1. Anthropological Model of Contextual Theology

The anthropological model of contextual theology is the opposite of the translation model. While the primary concern of the translation model is to preserve Christian identity in attempting to take culture, social change, and history seriously, the primary concern of the anthropological model is to establish or preserve the cultural identity of a person or a community in taking the gospel seriously. For example, it aims to produce Bodo Christians rather than Christian Bodos. It gives more emphasis on the cultural identity of a community than Christian identity. The emphasis on cultural identity is particularly important for the subaltern Christian religious education.

The anthropological model focuses on the “value and goodness of *anthropos*, the human person” and thus it takes into consideration human experiences as sites where God is at work. Practitioners of this model rely on the insights of anthropology and social sciences to cultivate an approach to theology that is sensitive to the web of human relationships and meanings that not only produce human cultures but also act as ciphers through which God becomes manifest, offering life, healing and wholeness.⁵⁶² Thus, this model presupposes that human context/culture is good, holy, and valuable, a location for God’s revelation. Revelation is not a series of supra-cultural messages or doctrinal

⁵⁶² Bevans, *Models*, 55.

deposits. It is living in history and culture. The Bible, in this view, is approached neither as necessarily having a particular message nor as a set of doctrines but as a product of “socially and culturally conditioned religious experiences” of Israel and early Christians.⁵⁶³ The term *indigenization* is also used to convey the anthropological model, particularly in the Third World context. It signifies how God is experienced and understood through processes and meanings that are indigenous and embedded in local contexts.

Indeed, God is present and at work in cultures prior to the arrival of the missionaries. Echoing Robert T. Rush, Bevens asserts that the anthropological model views a missionary as a “treasure hunter” rather than a “pearl merchant.” God’s revelation and truths are hidden in human cultures/contexts and the missionary must seek to reveal them rather than to provide them. As a result, this model emphasizes inculturation in its approach to theology.⁵⁶⁴ Inculturation affirms culture as the location where the gospel takes root, culture having the capacity to nourish growth in understanding and deepen the “incarnation” of the gospel in human life. Accordingly, following Leonardo Mercado, Bevens also points out that this model considers the context/culture of each community to be unique, such that a missionary or educator must actively participate in the context/culture in which he or she is teaching in order to understand it. Finally, this model supports interreligious dialogue as an extension of its belief that culture is valuable and that each culture can be a unique expression of God’s presence in a society.⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶³ Bevens, *Models*, 56.

⁵⁶⁴ Bevens, *Models*, 56-57; see also Robert T. Rush, “From Pearl Merchant to Treasure Hunter: The Missionary Yesterday and Today,” in *Catholic Mind* (September, 1978), 6-10.

⁵⁶⁵ Bevens, *Models*, 58-59.

2. Faith Community Approach/Model

The faith community model/approach of Christian religious education has been widely discussed by many well-known Christian education theorists in recent years.⁵⁶⁶ It is primarily focused on spiritual formation rather than instructional concerns. Following its early chief proponent, Edward Eggleton, in his 1872 article “The Uniform Lesson Question,” this model does not put much emphasis on the “yokes of the day-school classification, and grading and marking the amount of knowledge the test” in doing Christian religious education. The faith community model argues that the primary aim of teaching has to be “spiritual” rather than “instructional.”⁵⁶⁷ It finds its sources for education through community life and experiences. Its main architect, John Westerhoff III, argues that educational activity has to be seen as a process of inculturation and as a pastoral activity. Westerhoff suggests that the limitations of church education do not lie in specific educational programs but rather in the paradigms or models they use. Thus he proposes the faith community model as an alternative to the schooling-instructional paradigm.⁵⁶⁸ This approach foregrounds the role of community life, where genuine teaching and learning take place amidst relationships and life experiences. The community life of the church, in particular, becomes the primary context, content and method of teaching/learning Christian faith. This idea will be developed further in the

⁵⁶⁶ See S. Steve Kang, “Salient Theoretical Framework for Forming Kingdom Citizen” in Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, S. Steve Kang and Gary A. Parrett, eds., *A Many Colored Kingdom: Multi cultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 80-88; see also C. Ellis Nelson, *Where Faith Begins* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1971), Charles Foster, *Educating Congregation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Spirituality of Education* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1993). Their works emphasize faith community based education.

⁵⁶⁷ Seymour and Miller, eds., *Contemporary Approaches*, 20; see also Edward Eggleton, “The Uniform Lesson Question” in *The Fifth National Sunday School Convention* (New York: Aug. O. Van Lennep, 1872), 92.

⁵⁶⁸ John H. Westerhoff III, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976), 51- 78.

fifth chapter, when I incorporate it into my approach to Christian religious education.

Despite its focus on spirituality, this model does not completely ignore educational theory. Rather, it aims to keep proper perspective, seeing education as a way of helping people express people's faith through the symbols and concepts specific to their communities. The life of the community and its culture is valued as a site where the gospel is made relevant and meaningful.

It is safe to say that the faith community model of Christian religious education is directly influenced by ingredients in the anthropological model of contextual theology, which views culture positively as a site where God works. It also draws on liberation theology and creation theology. Latin American liberation theology offers us a new vision of theology as praxis and community transformation. Creation-centered theology offers us a new vision of cosmology through which we can view community.⁵⁶⁹ God is seen as being revealed continually within creation, history and community and not in a separate supra-cultural revelation or message.⁵⁷⁰ This makes the experiences, events, and cultures of human beings very relevant to the theory and practice of Christian religious education.⁵⁷¹ As McAfee Brown says, the faith community model builds on the insight that "context affects contents"⁵⁷² and shapes the curriculum and agenda of Christian religious education. I will visit this point again in more depth when I discuss the context of the learners and curriculum meant for them in Chapter Five.

⁵⁶⁹ Robert T. O'Gorman in his essay "The Faith Community" discusses how liberation theology and creation theology can be theological approaches of faith community approach/model of religious education in Jack L. Seymour, ed., *Mapping Christian Education: Approaches to Congregational Learning* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 46.

⁵⁷⁰ Bevans, *Models*, 56.

⁵⁷¹ Charles R. Foster, *The Future of Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 37-50; see also Seymour and Miller, *Contemporary Approaches*, 53-58.

⁵⁷² Robert McAfee Brown, "The Rootedness of All Theology: Context Affects Content" in *Journal Christianity and Crisis*, 37 (New York: July 18, 1977), 170-174.

The anthropological model of contextual theology also correlates with the way the faith community model approaches the Bible. Here, the Bible is viewed as the product of socially and culturally conditioned religious experiences of Israel and the early Christian community and the doctrinal formulations of traditions, rather than necessarily as heavenly inspired words.⁵⁷³ A crucial implication of this approach for the theory and practice of Christian religious education is that creeds and doctrines must be unpacked and explored through the language, idioms and cultural settings of different communities. Thus the faith community model takes a creation-centered theological approach rather than a redemption-centered. A creation-centered theology can be “characterized by the conviction that human experience, and so context, is generally good,” while “[a] redemption-centered [theology], in contrast, is characterized by the conviction that culture and human experience are either in need of a radical transformation or in need of total replacement.”⁵⁷⁴ Creation-centered theology places emphasis on meanings and practices emerging from inside the uniqueness of human context/culture in the development of its curricula rather than on inserting a timeless message or core content as something to be deposited from and managed by the outside.⁵⁷⁵

3. Critique

The anthropological model of contextual theology regards human reality/culture positively and attests to the goodness of all creation, understanding revelation as the result of human beings’ encounter with God in and through Jesus Christ.⁵⁷⁶ This

⁵⁷³ Bevans, *Models*, 56.

⁵⁷⁴ For an elaborate definition of these two theological orientations, see Bevans, *Models*, 21-22.

⁵⁷⁵ O’Gorman, “The Faith,” 46; see also Bevans, *Models*, 57.

⁵⁷⁶ Bevans, *Models*, 59.

perspective is essentially the fundamental theology behind the faith community model of Christian religious education. There is a renewed awareness in the importance of community and congregational life, in contrast with the common Western attitude that education is about individual development.⁵⁷⁷ As this model allows men and women to see Christianity in a fresh light within their cultural settings, there is no need to import foreign ideas when developing educational programs. Following Bevans, we can assert that education starts where people are, with people's real questions and interests, rather than imposing questions drawn from other contexts.⁵⁷⁸ At work here is an affirmation that suggests God's love and grace are manifest in community life, such that every individual in the community is both learner and teacher. This collapses strong dichotomies between clergy and laity and professional (academic) and nonprofessional (non-academic).

However, the major weakness of this model can be its forms of cultural romanticism, which sometimes is evidenced in practices of uncritical thinking about particular cultures.⁵⁷⁹ Christian religious education based on such theology may simply accept a church as a faithful community without challenging real distortions or dehumanizing practices that cut against the gospel, which might arrest change and growth in the community.⁵⁸⁰ Uncritical inculturation may encourage a community to maintain the status quo of an unjust arrangement of power.⁵⁸¹ Also, as the culture of any given community is contingent and in constant flux, any totalizing vision or desire to seek a

⁵⁷⁷ O'Gorman, "The Faith," 55; see also Seymour and Miller, eds., *Contemporary Approaches*, 32-33.

⁵⁷⁸ Bevans, *Models*, 59-60.

⁵⁷⁹ Bevans, *Models*, 60.

⁵⁸⁰ Seymour and Miller, eds., *Contemporary Approaches*, 32-33.

⁵⁸¹ Charles R. Foster, "The Faith Community As a Guiding Image for Christian Education," in Seymour and Miller, eds., *Contemporary Approaches*, 53-71.

“pure” or “original” version of a culture is fundamentally flawed.⁵⁸² Furthermore, as the anthropological model of contextual theology emphasizes the uniqueness of the culture of a given community, it may lead to the development of a “nativist” theology that is insular and serves to baptize the culture rather than open said culture in love toward God and neighbor. Christian religious education is not served well if its sole purpose is to preserve the identity of a culture and justify its “uniqueness.” More is needed.

C. The Praxis Model and the Liberation Approach/Model

While the goal of the translation model of contextual theology is to establish and preserve Christian identity and that of anthropological model is to preserve and maintain cultural identity, the praxis model of contextual theology focuses on the constant social change within a community, and how this change might be identified and harnessed as a transformative and liberating cultural force according to the gospel. In this sub-section, I analyze the praxis model of contextual theology and then the liberation approach to Christian religious education, showing how the orientation of the former has influenced the later. I will then evaluate the liberation approach in light of Bevans’ critique of the praxis model.

1. Praxis Model of Contextual Theology

Bevans points out that although the concept of praxis has its roots in the Frankfurt school of Marxism, and despite rigorous attempts made by theologians including Schleiermacher, Mohler, Barth, Tillich, and Rahner to connect practice to beliefs derived from speculative theology, it was the Latin American theologian John Sobrino who

⁵⁸² Bevans, *Models*, 60.

articulated the meaning of praxis in the context of theology and Paulo Freire who applied it to educational philosophy as “action and reflection.”⁵⁸³ Sobrino noted the immense influence of Enlightenment ideals on Euro-American theologies, from Descartes through Kant’s philosophy of rationality and subjective responsibility. The notion of praxis, as a theological as well as pedagogical orientation to transformative action challenged the viewpoints of eminent theologians, the Catholic magisterium and the authority of many religious systems. In light of this, according to Sobrino, it became necessary to use the historical-critical method to locate faith in historical and cultural contexts, which has resonance with postcolonial concerns. Furthermore, Sobrino was influenced, says Bevens, by Marx’s argument that “rationality or intellectual knowledge was not enough to constitute genuine knowledge. Even personally appropriated knowledge, while infinitely better than believing in someone else’s authority, was not enough.”⁵⁸⁴ The point is not merely to think about, but to change society. Therefore, appropriating this Marxist dictum, Third World theologians emphasize not mere “right-thinking” (ortho-doxy) but “right acting” (ortho-praxy).⁵⁸⁵

The praxis model is built on a number of important presuppositions. The first is that the focus should not be faith seeking understanding but faith seeking intelligent action/doing. Theology is not done through writing articles, books, or essays but through concrete human actions and the process of living. Second, although it shares recognition of human cultural values with the translation and anthropological models, it subjects economic and political systems to critical analysis, and maintains that the articulation of

⁵⁸³ Bevens, *Models*, 72. Freire discusses the concept of praxis in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 1970).

⁵⁸⁴ Bevens, *Models*, 71-72.

⁵⁸⁵ Bevens, *Models*, 70-73.

faith cannot be economically and politically neutral. Third, it recognizes cultural hybridity and postcolonial variety as products of social conflict as a part of ongoing social change and the struggle against oppression in different forms. Fourth, it “understands revelation as the presence of God in history—in the events of the everyday life, and economic and social structures.” Men and women are called to cooperate in “God’s work of healing, reconciling, liberating” and so every individual has the opportunity and potentiality to theologize.⁵⁸⁶

2. Liberation Approach/Model

The liberation model/approach of Christian religious education is developed out of liberation theology and the praxis model of contextual theology. It was developed in Latin America, making it an unambiguously Third World model of Christian religious education. Its main concern is social justice and equality. In this model, the suffering, exploitation, oppression, and dehumanization found in certain social contexts influence the agenda and curriculum of churches’ educational ministry. It relies on the Bible and seeks to align its vision with biblical promises of justice in God’s reign. Practitioners of the liberation model include the likes of Henry Ward Beecher, Malcom Warford, Grant Shockley, Brian Wren, and Allen J. Moore. Similar to the praxis model, the key factors in this model of education are context, praxis and vision.⁵⁸⁷ It takes context/culture seriously, particularly the realities of suffering, oppression, and dehumanization. It is not merely interested in speculative contents/doctrines/belief systems (ortho-doxy) but also in action/engagement and participation (ortho-praxy) through the ongoing process of

⁵⁸⁶ Bevans, *Models*, 73-75.

⁵⁸⁷ Seymour and Millers, eds., *Contemporary Approaches*, 25-27.

“action and reflection.” It is inspired by a vision of the kingdom of God, where justice, peace, and the integrity of creation are paramount.

It was Paulo Freire who first applied praxis and the liberation model to educational philosophy and methodology. In his work, Freire argues that there cannot be a neutral education system. They all tend towards supporting either domestication or liberation. The education system, he claims, can be one of domestication based on a banking model of education that avoids any critical reflection. Based on his work, Western academics later developed what is called “critical pedagogy.”⁵⁸⁸

The liberation approach/model of Christian religious education based on a praxis model of contextual theology is seen as an activity of God in an ongoing process of reflection-upon-action and action-upon-reflection, both rolled into one in the complex web of human relationships and culture(s). Since the basic presupposition of the praxis model is that the highest level of knowing is intelligent and responsible doing, so also in liberation model ethico-political responsibility becomes paramount in the church’s educational ministry in society. As the praxis model understands “revelation as the presence of God in history,”⁵⁸⁹ God’s presence must be understood to permeate the socio-economic-political life of people, especially the poor and marginalized. As a result in liberation model the socio-economic-political liberation and transformation of the oppressed and marginalized become the key themes in church education. In a praxis model, God’s calling to people is to be in partnership with God and to theologize in solidarity with others; and thus in a liberation model of Christian religious education students are subjects of learning rather than mere objects.

⁵⁸⁸ See Henry A. Giroux and Peter McLaren, eds., *Critical Pedagogy, the State and Cultural Struggle* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

⁵⁸⁹ Bevans, *Models*, 74-75.

3. Critique

The greatest contribution of the praxis model in education lies in its underlying Marxist epistemological approach, which represents a radical break from a preoccupation with rationality and meaning but rather toward a knowledge that is wedded to particular contexts and social transformation.⁵⁹⁰ As a result, the liberation model of Christian religious education reinforces the importance of the church's involvement in justice and social transformation.⁵⁹¹ The praxis model has three dimensions characterizing its commitment to faith. It sees faith analytically; it judges faith theologically and acts on faith pastorally or politically.⁵⁹² As a corollary, the liberation approach/model follows suit in the educational ministry of the church.

However, despite the unique Marxist insights of this model, Bevans correctly argues that it can overly fixate on theology as a means to social change, neglecting more holistic concerns. He also criticizes its selective and even naive reading of the Bible and its inability to see grace in society and popular religiosity, while highlighting the negative aspects of a society/community. Furthermore, the praxis model can theologically romanticize the poor in economic terms, obscuring the complexities of oppression at the intersections of gender, sexuality, ability/disability, race, etc.⁵⁹³ A liberation approach of Christian religious education based on praxis model of contextual theology still remains unable to deal with larger questions of power and change in the church and society.⁵⁹⁴ Further, in its pedagogical practices it still remains caught up in binary oppositions such as rich/poor, master/slave, exploiter/exploited, and have/have not.

⁵⁹⁰ Bevans, *Models*, 77.

⁵⁹¹ Seymour and Miller, eds., *Contemporary Approaches*, 32-33.

⁵⁹² Bevans, *Models*, 77.

⁵⁹³ Bevans, *Models*, 78.

⁵⁹⁴ Seymour and Miller, eds., *Contemporary Approaches*, 32-33.

D. The Development Theory and the Spiritual Development Approach/Model

Here, I depart from Bevans because none of the Bevans' models of contextual theologies correlates with the spiritual development approach/model. Based on James Fowler's use of Richard Niebuhr's theology, it relies theologically on a monotheistic theology, as Romney Mosely points out, interprets faith as a fiduciary relationship on which value and power are centered,⁵⁹⁵ though it has rather stronger connection with development theories,⁵⁹⁶ influenced by the humanities and Western episteme.

1. Development Theory

The "development" metaphor in Western epistemology has its origin in the notion of development narrative or paradigm after the Second World War. Tikly points out that the concept of "development" and "underdevelopment" and the eventual "development age" was officially consecrated with the four points of U.S. President Truman's inaugural address. It was the time when European countries started to reconstruct their economy within the contours of development paradigm.⁵⁹⁷ Tikly argues that the "development" paradigm is part of the Western "religion of modernity" and "the myth of western society," which has its roots in the European enlightenment and links development with "growth" and "civilization" to justify the disparate projects of liberalism, Marxism,

⁵⁹⁵ Romney Mosley, "Education and Human Development in the likeness of Christ" in Seymour and Miller, eds., *Theological Approaches*, 73-102.

⁵⁹⁶ Mosley, "Education and Human," 146-162; see also Miller, "The Development Approach to Christian Education" in Seymour and Miller, eds., *Contemporary Approaches*, 73-102.

⁵⁹⁷ Leo Tikly, "Education and New Imperialism" in Roland S. Coloma, ed., *Postcolonial Challenges in Education*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2009), 23-45. See also I. Fagerlind and L. Saha, *Education and National Development: A Comparative Perspective* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1989).

fascism and imperialism.⁵⁹⁸ In the epistemological arena, the development paradigm was accompanied by the growth of development studies as a field. Although development theory has always had a focus on the development of economics, it is a multidisciplinary in nature and, therefore, a profoundly *cultural* discourse.⁵⁹⁹ The development paradigm was a “central organizing principle in the Western episteme,”⁶⁰⁰ which in turn influenced various developmental theories.

On the economic front, the idea of a development narrative gained momentum after the Second World War. The Breton Woods Conference, drawing on Keynesian principles, concocted a plan to reshape the world economy to mirror Western capitalism, with the United States and Western Europe as the frontline for aiding developing and underdeveloped countries across the globe. The overarching goal was to incorporate former colonies and other countries—the rest of world outside the former Soviet states—into “the realm of modernity, that is, the western economic system, in which capitalism produces progressive economic growth.”⁶⁰¹

Havinder and Meredith point out that some colonial powers started this process after the First World War, but it was greatly accelerated after the second.⁶⁰² However, colonial powers (with the exception of Japan) were really only concerned with the way they could leverage the former colonies’ resources for their own economic development.

⁵⁹⁸ Tikly, “Education,” 30. From Bhabha’s thoughts we have seen a similar argument in the third chapter. For more details, see G. Rist, trans. Patrick Camiller, *The history of development: From western origins to global faith* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Zed Books, 1997); V. Tucker, “The myth of development: A Critique of Eurocentric discourse” in R. Munk and D. O’Hearn, eds., *Critical Development Theory* (London, New York: Zed, Books 1999), 1-26.

⁵⁹⁹ Tikly, “Education,” 23-45.

⁶⁰⁰ Tikly, “Education,” 30.

⁶⁰¹ Robert C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2001), 49.

⁶⁰² See Michael Havinder and David Meredith, *Colonialism and Development: Britain and its Tropical Colonies, 1850-1960* (London: Routledge, 1995).

Arturo Escobar writes how a vast number of academic experts were deployed to provide information about “underdeveloped” societies in order to foster their economic and cultural growth.⁶⁰³ The concept of development was always prescriptive, with a particular agenda of “raising up” peoples into modernity and its benefits. Initially the former colonies enthusiastically welcomed the aid, but due to lack of proper infrastructures, inflation, and the devaluation of currency many ended up falling into a debt trap, paying far more in interest than what they borrowed.

Oazay Mehmet explains that the theoretical aim of these enterprises was to modernize—that is, to westernize, and now to globalize—the third world.⁶⁰⁴ As development was seen in linear terms, this led to new forms of colonialism. Neocolonialism emerged in former colonies, conceived in terms of dependence theory and leading to what are called “banana republics” in South America, countries, which were effectively run by multinational companies of the United States and of the European Union.⁶⁰⁵ While in these countries, transnational and multinational corporations virtually controlled the governments, economic power lying in the hands of the former colonizers, upon whom developing countries were now dependent. Therefore, a Western development narrative/paradigm with its focus on economy had become the driving force on former colonies’ (mission fields) economy, education and culture. It also influenced the developmental theories of Western academia, be it cognitive, psychological, emotional, and spiritual and faith development, which in turn influenced the spiritual development approach. We might schematize it like this:

⁶⁰³ See Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

⁶⁰⁴ See Oazay Mehmet, *Westernizing Third World: The Eurocentricity of European Economic Development Theories* (London: Routledge, 1995).

⁶⁰⁵ Young, *Postcolonialism*, 50.

Development paradigm, → Developmental theories, → Spiritual development.

This has resulted in two far-reaching influences on religious education enterprises and Christian missions both at “home mission” and “mission fields.” First, a number of educational literatures were framed and produced in terms of development theory. Such literatures include the works of Jean Piaget on cognitive development,⁶⁰⁶ Erik Erikson on psychosocial development,⁶⁰⁷ and Lawrence Kohlberg on moral development,⁶⁰⁸ and James Fowler on faith (both theological and psychosocial) development.⁶⁰⁹ Susanne Johnson comments that perhaps Christian religious education has for decades rested on an over-reliance on Erikson’s eight stages of psychosocial development to articulate the doctrine of sanctification and their corresponding implications in an individual’s life cycle as well as on Fowler’s structural-developmental theory for an individual’s faith development.⁶¹⁰ In recent years Christian educators have turned to developmental

⁶⁰⁶ Jean Piaget, *Six Psychological Studies* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967). Piaget’s work on cognitive theory breaks into three stages- first, the stage of *sensory motor*, second the stage of *pre-operational* and the third, the stage of *concrete operation*. It becomes one of the foundations for understanding of mental development in the spiritual development model of Christian religious education.

⁶⁰⁷ Erik Erikson, *Identity and Life Cycle*, (New York: International University Press, 1959). Based on Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis on *oral*, *anal* and *genital*, Erikson developed eight stages of a theory of life cycle of human life in binary opposition, first, *basic trust vs. mistrust*, second, *autonomy vs. shame, doubt*, third, *initiative vs. guilt*, fourth, *industry vs. inferiority*, fifth, *identity vs. identity confusion*, sixth, *intimacy vs. isolation*, seventh, *generativity vs. stagnation*, and eight, *integrity vs. despair*. This became the foundation for an understanding of psychosocial development in the spiritual development approach of Christian religious education.

⁶⁰⁸ Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of moral development: moral stages and the idea of justice* (San Francisco; Toronto: Harper & Row, 1981), *The Psychology of moral development: the nature and validity of moral stages* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984). Lawrence outlines three levels of moral development in human beings with two stages in each level: First level, *preconventional-* (*punishment and obedience*), second level- *conventional-* (*naïve instrumental and relativism*), and the third level, *postconventional-* (*social contract and universal justice*). This became the foundation for an understanding of moral development in the spiritual development approach of Christian religious education.

⁶⁰⁹ James Fowler, *Stages of faith: the psychology of human development and the quest for meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Press, 1981). Fowler outlines six stages of faith development: stage one- *intuitive-protective*, stage two, *mythical-literal*, stage three, *synthetic-conventional*, stage four, *individuative- reflexive*, stage five, conjunction of *symbolic and conceptual* in a dialectical way, and the stage six- *universalizing*. This became the foundation for an understanding of faith development for spiritual development approach. All these development theories suggest a linear growth.

⁶¹⁰ Susanne Johnson, “Education in the Image of God” in Seymour and Miller, eds., *Theological Approaches*, 132-133.

theories to help understand the religious formation of persons and aid in the formulation of educational strategies and curricula. Romney Moseley comments this may be because “development” as a root metaphor in development theories attracted educationists, as it provides trajectories of human existence in neatly ordered stages.⁶¹¹

Second, the plan and policies of missions and their programs, particularly theological and religious education programs, began to be based on development theory, which in turn spread its influence to the churches and educational institutions of the mission fields. Following the colonial tradition of sharing wealth, resources, knowledge and enlightenment of the north to the south, the NBBCA decided to mandate an annual action plan on the line of Baptist General Conference (BGC), U.S.A., (our “parent body”), showing annual growth in each department—mission and evangelism, Christian literature, Christian education and youth, relief and development, theological education, women’s ministry, and general education. Data collection, statistics, and reporting became the key elements in our ministry.⁶¹² Graded Sunday school materials for nursery, primary, junior, intermediate, and senior levels were designed according to the tenets of developmental theories with the emphasis on linear human development or growth and they are still in vogue in NBBCA churches. “Growth” has been a buzzword in churches across all ecclesiastical backgrounds since the heightened missionary period. The mission experts (both former missionaries and native missiologists) have done extensive research and study on the strategy, principles, and methods of church growth that churches followed and executed in their ministries. Churches in mission fields laid out plan,

⁶¹¹ Mosely, “Education and Human Development,” 146-162.

⁶¹² NBBCA was formed in 1950. As a secretary for Christian education department for a number of years in NBBCA, I had to show to establish at least 50 new Sunday Schools in the annual plan. So also the Mission Department had to show at least 50 new churches in a year. There was a five-year plan too.

policies, and programs in accordance with their home missions that were similar to multinational companies' expansionist strategies.⁶¹³

2. Spiritual Development Approach/Model

Based on various development theories—including psychological, emotional, moral and spiritual—the spiritual development model of Christian religious education places more emphasis on the experience of the learner and the individual's quest for meaning in life than on the content and methods of teaching and learning. The main goal in this model is individual growth, though according to Miller it can be extended to groups, communities and even to the nations as well.⁶¹⁴ The lessons are designed according to the stages of growth outlined by different development theorists, particularly those described above (i.e., Piaget, Erikson, Kohlberg, and Fowler). Miller claims that Erik Erikson's development theory had the “greatest impact”⁶¹⁵ on spiritual development. Miller argues that the concept of development in education shows the influence of Darwin's theory of cultural evolution. From the Bible, the model takes inspiration from Paul, including 1 Corinthians 13:11, 1 Corinthians 3:12b, and Ephesians 4:13. It relies on classical Greek and Roman philosophy, particularly that of Plato, who proposed a four-staged educational curricula covering sense experience, athletics, arithmetic and astronomy, and philosophy (which allow access to the eternal reality of form). Further, Miller claims that children's literature of the twentieth century, such as Newbery's *Mother Goose's Nursery Rhymes*,

⁶¹³ After leaving NBBCA, I worked with an organization called “The Association For Theological Education by Extension,” (TAFTEE) as a Regional Coordinator for northeast India for eight years, which followed similar patterns of ministry in line with multinational companies, where marketing and growth became key factors.

⁶¹⁴ Donald E. Miller, “Development Approach- to Christian education,” in Seymour and Miller, eds., *Contemporary Approaches*, 76.

⁶¹⁵ Miller, “Development Approach,” 83.

the *New England Primer*, McGuffey's *Reader* and *Alice in Wonderland* have deep affinities with "development"⁶¹⁶ theories within the wider context of the Western episteme. Adherents of the spiritual development model include Gloria Dukta, Joanmarie Smith, James Fowler, Donald E. Miller, James and Evelyn Whitehead, Mary Wincox, Ross Snyder, and Craig Dykstra.

According to this model, human development operates in basic three formats: ground plan or "pre-existing structure," an invariant sequence and an end-state.⁶¹⁷ For example, for Freud the ground plan or pre-existing structure is that an individual moves through oral, anal and genital stages. For Piaget an individual moves through sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational stages. All development theories suggest such a ground plan or pre-existing structure. Second, in variance sequence, in an individual "[any] given stage presumes the previous stage and leads to the next stage."⁶¹⁸ No one can skip any of these stages. For example according to Piaget a child cannot move from sensorimotor to concrete thinking without passing the stage of preoperational stage. This premise applies to every development theory. Then the third element or format is that an individual integrates all the increasing complex elements, where "an individual achieves a dynamic unity of existing elements."⁶¹⁹ This integration of an individual represents a "universal stage" on the one hand and on the other represents "a unique synthesis" of all elements that remain "stable" in an individual

⁶¹⁶ Miller, "Development Approach," 74-75.

⁶¹⁷ For the development sequence from one element to the next, see Miller, "Development Approach," 75-77. See also R. S. Peters, "Education and Human Development" in R. F. Dearden et al., eds., *Education and Reason* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 112.

⁶¹⁸ Miller, "The Development Approach," 76.

⁶¹⁹ Miller, "The Development Approach," 76.

until thwarted by other elements that require reworking.⁶²⁰ In addition Miller describes two more elements. So the fourth element of development is the interaction between the individual and environment and the fifth is a particular goal or *telos* of an individual.⁶²¹ In all these theories there is an implied understanding of linear development/growth (from one stage to the next) in similar line with the linear growth of development narrative/paradigm.

3. Critique

The adherents of the spiritual development model claim that its major contribution in Christian religious education is defining the ways in which faith grows in children and adults.⁶²² They argue that this model helps educators to see how faith develops in individuals. It also helps to integrate human experience into the teaching and learning process. However, critics point out that this model places more emphasis on psychological resources than spiritual resources, and focuses on private spirituality over social issues, which can lead to narcissism. It also fails to integrate individual experiences theologically within the larger context of the church/community.⁶²³ Individual development itself may function in socio-cultural terms—that is according to contextual factors—to a greater degree than this approach recognizes.

On another note, Moseley argues that Fowler's structuralist and empiricist theory of faith development has serious limitations in linking life stages into the evolution of a

⁶²⁰ Miller, "The Development Approach," 76-77.

⁶²¹ Miller, "The Development Approach," 77.

⁶²² Seymour and Miller, eds., *Contemporary Approaches*, 33-34.

⁶²³ Seymour and Miller, eds., *Contemporary Approaches*, 24-25.

human-divine relationship.⁶²⁴ Faith may reflect aspects of human development, but shouldn't be reduced to such development alone. Furthermore, although Fowler does not specify his reliance on the Judeo-Christian God for transcendent values, his reliance on Niebuhr's monotheistic theology raises questions as to how the people of other and henotheistic faiths form their values.⁶²⁵

From a postcolonial perspective, there are fundamental issues with the development theories upon which such models are developed. To what extent can we universalize any theory about the stages of human development without taking into account the historical and cultural contexts in which it is conceived? Can there really be uniform standards of development for all human beings and for all societies? Miller claims that Erik Erickson's formulation of "given stages" are "universally the same."⁶²⁶ There are, however, problems with notions of linear and unidirectional growth, as they gloss contradictions and complexities in favor of simplicity and overlook the influence of socio-cultural factors. Another concern is that the stages of all development theories suggest binary oppositions and thus operate in a Manichaeian framework, as if each stage is a factor of steering between polar extremes. Finally, as several critics have pointed out, the stages are successive and fixed on the notion of linear growth, especially Erikson's theory, for if one stage is missed the person cannot return to that stage. In all, then, development theory has homogenizing and totalizing tendencies. In such case these great development theories may manifest what Spivak calls a "racist paternalism" that silences

⁶²⁴ Moseley, "Education and Human Development," 148-149.

⁶²⁵ Moseley, "Education and Human Development," 148-149.

⁶²⁶ Miller, "The Development Approach," 84.

subaltern voices of resistance by appropriating their protest as proof of their “need.”⁶²⁷

Conclusion: Towards a Dialectical Integration

In this chapter, we have seen both the strengths and weaknesses of various Christian religious education models, using Bevans’ models of contextual theologies as analytical tools. We also have considered those educational models in light of postcolonial perspectives. The first general conclusion is that no model is adequate enough for all situations and locations, and none of the models claims to be so.

We have a massive body of Christian religious education literatures at our disposal, basically produced from the West. Certain ecclesiastical traditions in India follow their own curricula and systems that are produced in the West, and are largely inflexible or closed to new ideas. In such cases, the result of reading Christian literature without any concern for critical reflection can be academically harmful for the learners on historical-cultural, ideological, and theological grounds. On the other hand, out of an unreflective interest in celebrating diversity and new ideas, we may end up falling into to what Reynolds calls “pluralism of dispersion,”⁶²⁸ where differences are merely celebrated without a sense for their depth or gravity and without an interest in their possible connections.⁶²⁹ A field like Christian religious education, which is a field of theological praxis, must always navigate the dialectical tensions between dominant and marginal,

⁶²⁷ Spivak, *Critique*, 372-373.

⁶²⁸ Thomas E. Reynolds, *The Broken Whole: Philosophical Steps Toward A Theology of Global Solidarity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 75.

⁶²⁹ Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, 73.

centre and periphery, East and West, We/Us and They/Them, and as well as the local and the global in a pluralistic and polycentric world.

Subaltern Christians such as the Bodos face pedagogical dilemmas due to postcolonial predicaments, which place them in the middle of these tensions, in the interstitial space of being “in between.” There is always a temptation in this sort of situation to accept whatever is familiar and available and to reject everything else as alien. But can there be a meeting point where conversation and dialogue can occur so as to productively harness the tensions and bring forth dialectical integration? The following chapters set out to construct a dialectically integrative system for Christian religious education that will acknowledge and embrace these dialectical tensions and seek to use the conversations they create to foster global solidarity through hospitality, dialogue, humility and justice.

Chapter Five

An Integrative/Dialogical Model of Christian Religious Education:

A Subaltern Approach

Introduction

In this chapter I propose an integrative model of Christian religious education, which also can be called a dialogical model, based on pedagogical dimensions drawn from Bodo saori. I have already investigated perspectives on culture that focus on coherence and sameness (and explored saori in this light) and also on discontinuity and difference (and discussed such in light of postcolonialism). In both senses culture is understood on a local level, from a Bodo context. Yet if we look at Christian religious education only in the context of a single particular culture, our results will be myopic, insular, and parochial. On the other hand, if we try to establish a universal perspective then education will be out of touch with the particular needs of individual contexts. Therefore, my argument is that to be relevant, effective and emancipatory Christian religious education must not only work for the integration of the dialectical tensions between particular and universal, dominant/cosmopolitan and periphery/vernacular, and local and global, but also for the integration of dialectical tensions between tradition and transformation, past and present, and context/experience and content/text. It must actively seek to turn these tensions into something positive and valuable.

Based on the analysis in Chapter Four it is evident that the existing models of Christian religious education are theoretically, methodologically, theologically, and pedagogically unable to address the concerns found in postcolonial churches. It is also

clear that countercultural or anticultural approaches to Christian religious education are still prevalent in the Bodo churches and that these approaches inherit ideological, historical, cultural, and theological concepts from Western churches and theological institutions and thus potentially are a problematic contributor to neocolonialism. We have observed how the epistemological categories of Christian religious education inherited from missionary teachings continue to affect the life and ministry of the Bodo churches, particularly the NBBCA, in arenas such as administration, semiotics, music, and observation of seasonal festivals, even after territorial decolonization. As has been discussed, colonialism need not always manifest as political domination, but can take place through conceptualizations, historical inscriptions, and institutional practices and interactions intended to seize and transform others as pliant objects and silenced subjects.

Decolonizing Christian religious education requires transformation at a number of levels, both inside and outside the church. The transformation of curricula and pedagogy has to be accompanied by a broad-based theological transformation and a new understanding of culture and its relation to epistemology. In addition, it requires that the relationships between knowledge and learning as well as between student and teacher experiences be taken seriously. In fact, the theorization and politicization of subaltern groups' experience is an essential step in developing a liberative and transformative Christian religious education. Experience is one of the major sources of subaltern knowledge, producing a knowledge oriented toward "thinking with them" and not "thinking about them."⁶³⁰ Decolonizing Christian pedagogical practices requires taking seriously the different logics of culture, as they are located within asymmetrical power

⁶³⁰ Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, "Mujerista Discourse: A Platform for Latina's Subjugated Knowledge" in Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz and Eduwardo Mendieta, eds., *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 44-67.

relations and accordingly make culture a terrain of struggle. In a classroom situation it requires that both teacher and students develop a critical awareness of how experience is understood, constructed, and legitimized in academic discourse. Without this sort of awareness there is no way to develop or nurture alternative practices.⁶³¹ This is equally true in theological or Christian religious education.

After a careful critique of colonial or imperial legacies in the teaching ministry of postcolonial churches, it is important to resist the urge to merely seek to restore the cultural symbols, rites, and rituals of a particular community. Such nostalgic gestures risk falling in traps of self-closure and insularity. There needs to be a balance between affirming the traditional and relatively stable cultural identity of a community (as a resistance to colonial power) and recognizing that culture itself is an unstable site of struggle and ongoing transformation. Thus, in this chapter I propose a model that integrates these elements with new approaches to teaching and learning derived from postcolonial theory.

This chapter consists of eight sections. In the first section, I define the meaning of dialectical integration. The second section deals with the model I am proposing, which I call an “integrative, dialogical or saorian” model. Then, in the third section, I describe the model catachrestically with its characteristics and functions, and define it as a catachrestic catechesis. A fourth section deals with the metaphor of the model—a community metaphor, a prevalent metaphor in Christian religious education theory.

While this has aspects in common with the faith community model discussed in Chapter Four, I attempt to advance the discussion beyond it in a dialectical way, balancing both

⁶³¹ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “On Race and Voice: Challenges for Liberal Education in 1990s” in Henry A. Giroux and Peter McLaren, eds., *Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 145-162.

continuity and change in tension. In the fifth section, I suggest a few specific methods of doing Christian religious education for and with subalterns, particularly the Bodo community. The sixth section deals with Bevans' synthetic model of contextual theology as a theological approach for the model, which can also be understood as a dialogical/conversational, dialectical, or intercultural model.⁶³² Finally, the seventh section addresses learners and teachers, and the eight section brief curricular items.

I. Defining Dialectical Integration/Whole

Following Reynolds' thoughts on "dialectical pluralism," I develop the concept of dialectical integration or whole. Following Anselm Kyongsuk Min, Reynolds defines dialectical pluralism as "[a] form of dwelling together that is both an "always already" and a "not yet," on the one hand a fact, and on the other a task stretching indefinitely forward, intimating the ever-deferred possibility of a maximally inclusive horizon of conversational solidarity and differences."⁶³³ Based on this concept I propose an integrative model of Christian religious education. By dialectical integration or whole, I mean opposing views or positions or discourses working together in constant conversation and dialogue and in the process being mutually transformed. It is an exploration of something positive and productive in dialectical tensions amidst contrasts and differences. It also means looking at truth-values from various angles or different optics in order to develop a holistic view, even though a complete "whole" is never achieved but realized only partially along the way. It also means looking at teaching and

⁶³² Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 88- 95.

⁶³³ See Thomas E. Reynolds, *The Broken Whole: Philosophical Steps Toward A Theology of Global Solidarity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 102. See Chapter Four for more details on this topic.

learning activity of a community/church from the perspectives of “always already” and “not yet” in a dialectical tension. Rather than merging together opposite discourses, narratives, positions and views, dialectical integration/whole seeks to see education take place in dialectical tensions through contrapuntal readings in the discursive terrains of the knowledge and experiences of communities. It is similar to what Parker Palmer calls an education based on “wholesight,” which involves both mind and heart/soul.⁶³⁴ Seeing it from a sociological context Mary M. Fulkerson calls it “switchers” and she claims that in the process some communities or learners may even “switch” their perspectives to the “dominant” narrative/discourse/symbols or position, while others might find new horizons opened up through this conversation.⁶³⁵ In this study, I do not mean dialectical integration strictly in an Hegelian sense: as between master/slave, self/other and West/East. For in an Hegelian sense, the other is sublated and annulled in the process of achieving a higher synthesis. Gadamer’s concept of dialectics is more helpful, where differences are played off one another dialogically and “integrate” as they coordinate together in learning, each remaining distinct yet joined into something more than each was before.⁶³⁶

Dialectical integration involves dialogical praxis in which tension between perspectives is considered a productive ingredient rather than a hindrance to be overcome. While in one way this can sound like yoking together two opposites through violence, it is not insofar as different parties agree to remain together in mutual respect

⁶³⁴ See Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), “Introduction,” xxii-xxvi.

⁶³⁵ See Mary McClintock Fulkerson, “‘We Don’t See Color Here’: A Case Study in Ecclesial-Cultural Invention” in Delwin Brown et al., eds., *Conversing on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 140-157.

⁶³⁶ See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 1975). Gadamer basically discusses dialectics from linguistic and hermeneutical viewpoints. See also Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, 87-95.

and dialogue. This is a challenging but achievable task. For even the Bible has seemingly paradoxical couplings: God's love of the sinner and yet hate of sin, Christ's humanity and divinity or Christ's death and resurrection. Truth is always full of irresolvable tensions that are woven together in dialectical and mutually supplementing ways. The teaching ministry of the church has to be *dialectically integrative* so as to acknowledge the particularities of individual contexts and encourage the development of global solidarity through hospitality, dialogue, humility, and justice.

II. Naming the Model: An Integrative/Dialectical Model

I am naming the model an "integrative model of Christian religious education" based on the integrative nature and function of saori and the concept of dialectical integration/whole. In our discussion of the pedagogical dimensions of saori in Chapter Two I have explained how saori already emphasizes dialectical integration. It is ritualistic but pedagogical, community oriented but enabling of individual development, traditional but suited to contemporary needs, and features action (saori) and reflection (saorai) working in harmony.

We can see suggestions of an "integrated model of Christian education" in Robert E. Pazmino's work, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*.⁶³⁷ However, Pazmino's model is confined only to the biblical foundations. Pazmino develops this model from a biblical understanding of the task of a church, using a baseball or softball metaphor suggested by Dr. E. V. Hill. In it, Pazmino suggests four interconnected bases of Christian education: education for/of community (koinonia), education for/of service

⁶³⁷ See Robert W. Pazmino, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education* (Michigan: Baker Books, 1977), 44-53.

(diakonia), education for/of advocacy (propheteia) and education for/of proclamation (kerygma), all of which lead to the central act of education for/of worship (leitourgia). The four bases are found in the New Testament church and therefore the model also can be called a New Testament model or early church model. As the key concepts of this model are generic, there is ample scope to expand on them. In my model, I shall try to move beyond the biblical perspective towards dialectical integration, as described earlier, taking into consideration postcolonial and postmodern sensibilities.

According to the Thesaurus dictionary, “to integrate,” means among other things a) to make something open to all, b) to make something whole. Keeping in mind these meanings, my model is open to particularities and differences, drawing on postcolonial and postmodern theory, while at the same time aiming for wholeness and solidarity. It is sensitive to individual communities/cultures and their potential epistemological categories for Christian religious education—that is in their semantics and semiotics, rites and rituals, and ethos and worldviews. It also suggests that such sensibilities must be open to improvisation and transformation and lead to emancipation. Because of differences both among and within communities/cultures, integration is open to new concepts, metaphors, paradigms, and methodologies, even as it also takes a holistic view of the teaching and learning processes.

Let me first clarify what the integrative/saorian/dialogical model of Christian religious education is not:

1. It is neither a mere conflation nor combination of the major models of Christian religious education discussed in Chapter Four. However, these theories are acknowledged in important ways as they have major roles in shaping Christian religious education.

2. It is not a simplistic merging of past and present, East and West, and/or dominant and margin. Nor is it an easy matter of positioning Western Christian religious education against everything else. To entertain such approach is to again legitimize the residual effects of colonialism in Christian religious education.

3. It is not an act of glorifying the local (and discarding the global) or emphasizing the global (and discarding the local). The former leads to ghettoization and separatism while the latter leads to cosmopolitan universalism with homogenizing and totalizing tendencies.

What, then, are the features of the integrative model?

It is a teaching and learning approach that seeks to integrate by balancing in productive tension—as in double vision—elements in epistemological categories from the local and global, particular and universal, parts and whole, and dominant/cosmopolitan and marginal/periphery. It foregrounds a local community's context and experience as a result of postcolonial and postmodern sensibilities but at the same time gestures toward a global Christian community. But such a gesture does not undermine local traditions practiced within the context of the language, idioms, semantics, and semiotics of particular cultural groups. Saori, in this sense, is a local resource in the Bodo context, but can widen its horizon in Christian religious education for global applications. The particulars of a community become the basis for constructing the meaning, goal, method, and curriculum. Reynolds, echoing Gadamer, observes that looking at the world from a particular cultural horizon “does not exhaust meaning,” enclosing meaning within a particular framework, but rather opens up intrinsically toward its own expansion, “not

being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it.”⁶³⁸ Local meanings and practices emerging from a particular community in its teaching/learning activity is an opening to something more than itself. And this is exemplified in how the gospel, a universal message of God’s grace, is taken up in local forms. To be relevant and effective, gospel has to be contextualized in and through a “particular time and place.”⁶³⁹ This is incarnational in style and content.

Advocating an Integrative/Saorian model of Christian religious education from a particular context/culture and time in doing Christian religious education does not necessarily negate the concept of global and universal shared horizons of truth-values. Initiating religious education based on the unique cultural experience of a community can affirm the identity of that community in a way that does not promote the self-referential closure of identitarianism. Although this kind of education may identify with the community—its culture and history—through the logic of continuity and coherence, we see in every community a willingness “to share, to belong, [and] to establish fruitful connections of solidarity with others.”⁶⁴⁰ While it emerges from a site of cultural particularity, it generates toward and “moves out” into a space of universality (though not in the sense of a colonial or imperial universalism).⁶⁴¹ Balancing particularity and universality, the integrative model engenders “heterogeneous variety without yielding fragmentation and insularity” while seeking global “solidarity and interconnectedness without totalizing homogeneity”⁶⁴² Dialectical integration neither begins with the

⁶³⁸ Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, 89. See also Gadamer, *Truth*, 302.

⁶³⁹ Thomas Groome, “Inculturation: How to Proceed in a Pastoral Context” in Norbert Greinacher and Norbert Mette, eds., *Christianity and Culture* (Maryknoll: ECM Press Ltd. & Orbis Books, 1994), 120-133.

⁶⁴⁰ Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, 47.

⁶⁴¹ Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, 78.

⁶⁴² Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, 47.

sameness or concordance of universality nor does it stop with the difference or discordance of particularity, but rather it envisions the possibility of discordant concordance for solidarity among differences produced in the dynamics of historical and cultural life.⁶⁴³ The ultimate aspiration is still to wholeness; though, again, such wholeness is constituted in and through differences rather than through their suppression or assimilation into something higher. Indeed, as Jane Vella puts it, the “whole is more than the sum of its parts.”⁶⁴⁴ Gadamer suggests that even in hermeneutics, there is a movement from the whole to the parts and then back to the whole, particularly in the textual interpretation,⁶⁴⁵ thus showing mutual interdependency between the whole and the parts. The whole cannot be interpreted without the parts and vice-versa.

In fact, indigenous people such as Bodos’ worldviews do not see parts separate from the whole. Opening up to a particular culture and historicity is done through what Tanner called a nonevaluative alternative to ethnocentrism.⁶⁴⁶ The self-representation/ understanding of the subalterns takes place as a part of subject constitution and developing collective agency, through varied epistemological categories constructed within the context of their cultural symbols, rites, and rituals. Its purpose is to enable the subaltern groups to understand and recognize themselves and their own historicity. Therefore, it is neither an ethnocentric conservatism nor a gesture toward essentialization. The objective is to empower subaltern groups to understand both self and other, allowing

⁶⁴³ Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, 104, and 589- 590, quoting Min in “Dialectical Pluralism and Solidarity of Others” Reynolds says “Neither elimination of all differences nor affirmation of sheer particularities is possible or desirable in an increasingly interdependent world, the former would lead to totalitarianism, the later to the conflict of particularism.”

⁶⁴⁴ Jane Vella, *Learning to Listen and Learning to Teach: The Power of Dialogue in Educating Adults*, 1st edition (San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass, 1994).

⁶⁴⁵ Gadamer, *Truth*, 291-292.

⁶⁴⁶ Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 36-37.

for forward movement toward global solidarity through conversation/dialogue while maintaining their own authoritative narrative.

The integrative model of Christian religious education also promotes dialectical integration between gospel/faith and culture, transcendence and immanence based on the “transcendental” and “anthropological” models of contextual theology.⁶⁴⁷ In integrative Christian religious education there is necessarily a dialectical encounter between faith/gospel and culture. As Groome rightly points out, there “is never a cultureless Christianity and never yet a fully Christian culture,” Christian religious education takes place in a “two way exchange” “from gospel to culture and from culture to gospel.”⁶⁴⁸ In other words, the gospel affirms and cherishes cultural aspects which are life giving and liberative while critiquing or bringing into question or even outright rejection those cultural aspects that are oppressive, patriarchal, and/or casteist, and which stand against the gospel. Meanwhile, a particular culture may affirm and cherish aspects of Christian faith that are life-giving and liberative while questioning and probing those that promotes domination and exclusion. Opening up for new possibilities for enriched expressions of Christian faith through indigenization and interculturalization is imperative for the transformation and improvement of a given community. Such endeavor gestures toward the whole, the universal, which is ultimately in God. There is thus always dialectical tension between gospel/faith and culture/community. Yet an integrative Christian religious education seeks to bring both into fruition in a dialectically integrative way through encounter and engagement.

The integrative model also recognizes the dialectical tension between tradition

⁶⁴⁷ Bevans, *Models*, 54-69 and 103-116.

⁶⁴⁸ Groome, “Inculturation,” 120-133.

(continuity) and contemporaneity (change/transformation), past/history and present, convention and innovation, and repetition and rupture, but utilizes such tensions as a creative strategy through conversation/dialogue and hospitality. By tradition, I mean both religious and cultural traditions. Tradition is a constitutive body of expressions—such as semantics and semiotic, rites and rituals, and ethos and worldviews—that structure and contextualizes the life of a community and allow for its preservation and sustenance. At the same time it is in constant dialogue with aspects of the present to inaugurate improvements, which gesture toward the future. As Orlando O. Espin succinctly explains, “tradition is not merely or mainly recall of the past or reference to it. Rather, it is a present interpretation of the past in reference to the future [...]. Continuity in tradition exists if and when people believe that continuity exists.”⁶⁴⁹ In a living community, there is always “continuity” and reference to past histories and meanings that carry over into the present. Yet tradition exists not just for the sake of continuity as ongoing repetition, but as an ongoing dialogue with the present through interpretation, which reinterprets past meanings with critical self-reflection with an eye toward the future. Acknowledging tradition as a dialogue between past and present in light of an “always already” and a “not yet” allows us to see how traditions move forward in dialectics of continuity and change. An integrative model takes account of this and is able to deploy the conception in a way that best supports the future growth of a culture/community and its epistemologies.

The integrative model also embraces the dialectical tension between content and context. This suggests connecting themes with the dialectic of gospel and culture. However, here I mean to indicate something more specific. By content I mean religious texts, discourse, and scripture; and by context I mean the culture and lived experiences of

⁶⁴⁹ Orlando O. Espin, *Grace and Humanness* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2007), 25.

individuals and communities. Unlike many of the education models discussed in Chapter Four, the integrative model refuses to acknowledge either content or context as primary. As Christian religious education is theological praxis, there has to be meaningful conversation between the two. There is no denying the fact that Christian religious education in a subaltern context may initiate from the lived experiences of individuals and communities. However, it must also engage and seek guidance from scripture and traditions through varied hermeneutics for the simple reason that we cannot exhaust the unfathomable mystery of God through our limited experiences. For example, we still continue to seek guidance and help from the Bible. Although the Bible was once instrumental in the project of colonization, it can be a means of liberation and emancipation for the Bodo churches with the right kind of interpretations.

Finally, the integrative model of Christian religious education recognizes cultural differences and cultural particularity but at the same time strives for dwelling together between “we/self” and “they/other,” and “East and West” in global solidarity through hospitality and dialogue. In recognizing differences we affirm a community/culture for its own unique identity rather than clinging to an illusionary singular universalized commonality. At the same time, however, in affirming particularity there is also an aspiration to “dwelling together in differences”⁶⁵⁰ that moves outside of insular communal formations. Cultural hybridity already assumes differences beyond simple cultural sameness. That cultural boundaries are porous suggests possible bridges of connection among cultures. Not by some universal measuring standard, but in a dialectic between particularity and universality in solidarity with others. Reynolds explains such solidarity as “a togetherness of differences that is more than their collective sum, more

⁶⁵⁰ See Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, Chapter Three, 77-100.

than a unifying act of appropriation and conformity to some putative common ground.”⁶⁵¹ It acts as a foil against so stressing particularity that each cultural group becomes separate unto itself. Reynolds reminds us to be cautious of this lest we trivialize differences, leading to a pluralism of dispersion and creating a sense of relativism or empty universalism that leads us nowhere. He calls for a “middle” way and this is where “hospitality”⁶⁵² comes into play. Any religious education must attempt to integrate this double-faced reality of community/culture into its teaching ministry. This does not mean that the communities must be integrated; rather, that teaching and learning must occur with the two realities of differences and togetherness of communities.

In sum, the integrative perspective is a dialogical one and it employs not an “either or” but a “both and” approach.⁶⁵³ So how is it done? I propose that apart from hospitality, dialogue, humility, and justice, which I will deal in the sixth chapter, an integrative model has to be constructed catachrestically. Therefore, catachresis is employed as both reading strategy and as a method of teaching and learning activity. In the following section, I will define and describe the meaning, characteristics, and functions of the integrative model catachrestically and, as such, I shall also call this model catachrestic catechesis.

III. Catachrestic Christian Religious Education in Integrative Model

The name of the model is “integrative Christian religious education.” However, I am defining its meaning, characteristics and functions catachrestically to accord postcolonial and postmodern sensibilities, so I am also naming it “Catachrestic Christian religious

⁶⁵¹ Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, 87.

⁶⁵² Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, 73-76.

⁶⁵³ Bevans, *Models*, 89-95.

education” or “Catachrestic catechesis.” I am borrowing the term and conceptual framework of catachresis from postcolonial theory.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, catachresis means “the application of a term to a thing that it does not properly denote.”⁶⁵⁴ The Webster’s Third New International Dictionary defines catachresis as a) “the use of [a] wrong word for the context,” and b) “the use of a forced figure of speech, especially one that involves or seems to involve strong paradox.” Originally it refers to the grammatical misuse of a term, but postcolonial theory has adopted it to mean something close to appropriation. Spivak defines catachresis, as “a space that the postcolonial [subject] does not want, but has no option, to inhabit.”⁶⁵⁵ Further, she defines it for literary purposes as, among other things, “abuse or perversion of a trope or metaphor.”⁶⁵⁶ It is reminiscent of the theological concept of syncretism.

Catachresis means that postcolonial subjects “inhabit the conceptual, cultural and ideological legacy of colonialism inherent in the very structures and institutions that formed the conditions of decolonization,”⁶⁵⁷ but with negotiation and critic. There is, therefore, an implied element of continuity. Catachresis is a process by which the colonized take and reinscribe something that traditionally seems to be of the colonizers’ or of the imperial culture. For instance, they might accept parliamentary democracy, but catachretize it by inserting and reinscripting “something which does not refer literally to

⁶⁵⁴ Bill Ashcroft et al., eds., *The post-colonial studies readers* (London, New York: Routledge, 1995), 34.

⁶⁵⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 13.

⁶⁵⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique on Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), 14.

⁶⁵⁷ Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2001), 418.

the correct narrative of the emergence of parliamentary democracy.”⁶⁵⁸ The term nation, when applied to various social groups—Zulu nation, Aboriginal nation, Sioux nation, or Bodo nation—that were in existence before colonization, is an example of catachresistic empowerment.⁶⁵⁹ The concept of catachresistic intervention provides empowering avenues for self-determination to subalterns and postcolonial subjects, revealing that concepts like parliamentary democracy might have existed in the pre-colonial native societies, although they emerged from Europe.

In education, particularly in Christian religious education, I am referring to catachresistic intervention as a process of reinscription of semantics and semiotics, rites and rituals, ethos and worldviews, and concepts and metaphors of social groups that existed before Christianity. In the process catachresis may intentionally wrest and displace or even misappropriate a particular meaning from its referent or proper name in order to rework, expand terms and knowledges.⁶⁶⁰ In religious educational settings it involves employing local cultures as resources for catachresis. It is a tactical maneuver in wrenching “particular images, ideas or rhetorical strategies out of their place within a particular narrative and using them to open up new areas of meanings”⁶⁶¹ for improvisation, variety, and novelty.

In my model, I use catachresis to mean both a method and reading strategy in the deconstruction/interrogation of dominant discourse/texts. Further, it neither means an amalgamation nor a syncretism of various cultural forms but rather is an endeavour to bring out positive and productive elements out of differences and paradoxes in

⁶⁵⁸ Ashcroft et al., eds., *Post-colonial*, 97.

⁶⁵⁹ Ashcroft et al., eds., *Post-colonial*, 65-76.

⁶⁶⁰ R. S. Coloma, “Palimpsest History and Catachrestic Intervention” in Coloma ed., *Postcolonial Challenges in Education* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2009), 8.

⁶⁶¹ Coloma, “Palimpsest History,” 8.

conversation to promote solidarity through intervention or interrogation. The next section will discuss how this can be done by defining its characteristics and functions.

A. Characteristics and Functions of Catachrestic Christian Religious Education in an Integrative Model

The main characteristics of catachrestic Christian religious education under the integrative model are as follows:

First, catachrestic Christian religious education employs an interventionist reading strategy. It interrogates, exposes, and resists the perpetuation of any conceptual, cultural, or ideological legacies of colonialism in indigenous contexts. This is not just a negative strategy, but allows for positive developments as well. As Gadamer rightly suggests, the “essence of the question is to open up possibilities and keep them open.”⁶⁶² It “is not positing but testing of possibilities.”⁶⁶³ Catachresis, then, is a questioning with a sense of direction and purpose, which is open but not boundless.⁶⁶⁴ It is a questioning of both “our” and “their” understandings, employing postcolonial, feminist, and intercultural hermeneutics to interrogate contexts of discourse and settled taken for granted meanings connected with colonial epistemic figurations. It questions and resists any kind of metanarrative or grand narrative that claims to have sole custody of truth.

This interventionist approach of interrogation and resistance draws heavily upon postmodern critical theories. Reynolds observes that hyper-reflexive postmodernist authors (like Foucault, Derrida, and Rorty) also interrogate and “take the negative shape of resistance—a posture of incredulity, distrust or even hostility toward universalizing

⁶⁶² Gadamer, *Truth*, 375.

⁶⁶³ Gadamer, *Truth*, 375.

⁶⁶⁴ Gadamer, *Truth*, 91.

and totalizing discourses, not simply because they are false but because they are insidious, serving to suppress the play of difference and to exclude voices of otherness.”⁶⁶⁵ Such resistance is necessitated because of the objectivist and universalist thrust of Enlightenment rationality,⁶⁶⁶ which was refracted through the Christian religious education of the missionaries.

Second, catachrestic Christian religious education takes the concepts, symbols, meanings, rites, and rituals promulgated by the dominant or imperial culture/text/discourse and melds them into a subaltern cultural framework.⁶⁶⁷ However, this is not appropriation just for the sake of capitulation, rather there is a strategic anticipation of new understanding and learning. Thus, along with critical resistance, catachresis adds a constructive dimension, deliberately contextualizing or inculturating biblical and theological themes to appropriate their meaning in a new key. For example, one of the dominant concepts in Western Christianity is the “kingdom of God.” In catachrestic Christian religious education “kingdom of God” can be appropriated as “kinship of God” in accordance with the indigenous concept of kinship.⁶⁶⁸ In Western Christianity, the concept of kingdom of God, which suggests a monarchical (imperial), patriarchal, and triumphalistic God, had defined mission, ministry, worship, and Christian religious education in churches from numerous denominations. When this concept is transformed into kinship of God, there is a wholesome change in the implied relationships between God and humanity and between human beings. Relations become framed in a more

⁶⁶⁵ Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, 51.

⁶⁶⁶ Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, 48.

⁶⁶⁷ Groome, “Inculturation,” 120-133.

⁶⁶⁸ For such models, see Sallie McFague, *Models of God: theology for ecological, nuclear age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987) and *The Body of God: an ecological theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), where she talks about the appropriation of “Kingdom of God” to “Kinship of God.”

horizontal than vertical perspective of power.

This sort of approach has already been explored in the theological arena. Sallie McFague, in her work *Models of God*, suggests different images of God, such as mother, lover and friend.⁶⁶⁹ In India, Sathianathan Clarke, in his work *Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religion and Liberation Theology in India*,⁶⁷⁰ proposes changing the symbol of Christ or Christianity from the cross to the drum, which serves as a signifier of subalterneity, as the drum is the central symbol of the Dalits' cultural life, particularly in south India. In this study, I have attempted to appropriate the concept of saori, showing how its pedagogical dimensions have potential implications for dialectical integration in Christian religious education. Appropriation and re-appropriation of images and concepts introduces variety and novelty and encourages communities/cultures to develop outward connections. Such an endeavour not only is transformative at local levels, it also enriches the body of knowledge in Christianity by expanding its cultural vocabulary at the global level.

However, despite the value of contextualization, it must be recalled that there are certain concepts in Christianity that are inescapable, such as God's love, grace, and forgiveness. These concepts and their underlying meanings are constant and universal, but will quite rightly be understood and expressed differently by different cultures/communities. Bevans and Schroeder suggest six constants in the title to their influential book, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*.⁶⁷¹ Catachrestic Christian

⁶⁶⁹ McFague, *Models of God*, 120-133.

⁶⁷⁰ Sathianathan Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religion and Liberation Theology in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 185-196.

⁶⁷¹ See Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 35-72. Bevans and Schroeder mention six constants: Christology, Ecclesiology, Eschatology, Salvation, Anthropology and Culture.

religious education will thus display a tension between universal Christian themes and their local appropriations in an ongoing dialogue. Persistent critical engagement is required especially because there will be some concepts and meanings from the so-called dominant cultures, ideologies and histories that indigenous Christians/churches, in Spivak's words, "cannot not wish to inhabit"⁶⁷² in their pedagogy.

Third, catachresistic Christian religious education invites native Christians to retrieve once erased and disavowed native rituals and festivals that were abandoned—due to missionary and imperial enterprises—and to incorporate them into teaching and learning. This is neither a regression into a romanticized indigenous past nor a perversion of Christianity. Instead, and somewhat paradoxically, such retrieval engenders variety and new transformed meanings. For example, among the Bodos, a ritual and festival called "amthisuwa"⁶⁷³ can be retrieved to explore ecological concerns. Amthisuwa is a week long festival of the Bodos, celebrated at the last week of June, where for three days they abstain from ploughing land and cutting tress, a symbolic gesture to the mother earth for replenishment and healing. Bodos believe that if a tree is cut during this period it will not grow again. They abstained from fishing and hunting for replenishment and growth thus showing harmony and interdependency between human beings, nature, plants, the animal world, and other sentient beings for mutual co-existence. Incorporation of such a festival in the body of Christian literature as part of cultural retrieval and practice would enhance our concern for wildlife and environmental preservation.

Finally, Catachrestic Christian religious education provides subalterns with

⁶⁷² Spivak, *Outside*, 284.

⁶⁷³ Amthisua is one of the festivals of the Bodos, observed with rites and rituals in the last week of June. For more details see Kameswar Brahma, *A Study of Socio-Religious Beliefs, Practices and Ceremonies of the Bodos* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1992). Unfortunately the present Bodo society has disavowed amthisua.

empowering avenues for self-determination and self-presentation. However, it is an empowerment with interruptions.⁶⁷⁴ While it does provide opportunities for the formation of subject constitution and collective agency, it also calls into question any reified and fetishized cultural practices that dehumanize and domesticate differences within the communities. It does so through the critical resistance and contextually constructive features discussed above, which hold open prospects for continual questioning and ongoing dialogue.

What, then, are the tasks of catachrestic Christian religious education in the integrative model? I propose the following.

First, it aims to enable communities to name and express their worldview, experiences, and how they perceive their culture and context.⁶⁷⁵ It allows for the construction of a body of knowledge for Christian religious education derived from the subjugated knowledges and lived-experiences of the impoverished⁶⁷⁶ and subalterns. Communication and dialogue can take place only when it is possible to express and name our world. Such expressing entails being faithful to one's own tradition in an attempt to go deeper and deeper into the particularities of one's own identity while at the same time being open to other traditions, which may challenge and enrich our own.⁶⁷⁷ In expressing a community's worldview, there is always a dialectical reciprocity of giving and receiving. Like dancing expresses oneself in an extension to others, so affirming one's cultural context provides an opening onto other perspectives.

Catachresis also aims to develop deconstructive Christian religious education

⁶⁷⁴ Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, 87.

⁶⁷⁵ Groome, "Inculturation," 130-131, see also Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Seabury Press, 1970), Chapter Two.

⁶⁷⁶ Isasi-Diaz, "Mujerista Discourse," 44-67.

⁶⁷⁷ David Tracy, *On Naming the Present* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 137.

lessons and discourses for indigenous/subaltern churches. One primary means of doing this is through processes of reconstruction and reconfiguration via contrapuntal readings of dominant texts and of those that are considered peripheral.⁶⁷⁸ There is no smooth sailing in such an endeavor. It is done in the “antagonistic *in between* of images and signs, the accumulative and the adjunct, presence and proxy”⁶⁷⁹ of ideology and theology between dominant and subaltern ecclesiastical traditions in conversation. There is pressure to fall in line with the dominant or mainstream doctrines, particularly at a denominational level. Through deconstructive lessons and discourses we can reconstruct texts and reconfigure signs and images from the perspective of the marginalized, forgotten, and neglected—even from the biblical texts.

Catachrestic Christian religious education also seeks to empower and enable the voiceless and powerless, those who are silenced and resides at the margins of social constituencies or theological constructions. As this study advocates for liberation as a goal—whether in theology, hermeneutics, or education—it is not just enough to construct/reconstruct knowledge; this knowledge must be translated into concrete *actions*. There has to be dialectical integration between words/voices and works/deeds. This is what Mary Ann Tolbert calls “poetics of location” and “politics of location.”⁶⁸⁰ The former must occur within the latter. At times, in taking a stand on the politics of location, it might be necessary to take a participatory role or even overt political action to bring about socio-political structural changes where patriarchy, racism, classism, and casteism

⁶⁷⁸ R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfiguration: an alternative way of reading the Bible and doing theology* (St. Louis, Mo: Chalice Press, 2003), 162-174.

⁶⁷⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 225-226.

⁶⁸⁰ Mary Ann Tolbert, “When Resistance Becomes Repression: Mark 13:9-27 and Poetics of Location” in Segovia and Tolbert, eds., *Reading From This Place* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 331-346.

still persist. But the goal is not simply liberation; it is also reconciliation. An excellent example is Bishop Desmond Tutu and his role during the apartheid regime in South Africa. His participation did not end with just protest and the overthrowing of unjust and oppressive socio-political structures; it also continued by leading to healing, reconciliation, and forgiveness. Bishop Tutu was at the forefront with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Catachrestic Christian religious education has the twin tasks of enabling and empowering the powerless, voiceless, and oppressed and bringing reconciliation, healing, and forgiveness among communities.

B. Towards a Definition of Catachrestic Christian Religious Education

Having examined the traits and goals of catachrestic Christian religious education, it is now possible to offer a definition:

Catachrestic Christian religious education, working in an integrative model with a subaltern approach, is a method and process of Christian religious education that makes an intentional and deliberate move to retrieve and appropriate the forgotten or erased cultural perspectives of a community—i.e., its semiotic and semantic coherence, its rites and rituals, ethos and worldviews, concepts and metaphors—with an eye toward contextualizing the gospel in the teaching and learning activity of the church. Its goal is the transmission, formation, and transformation of Christian religious faith life, conduct, and practices in the community, for the community, and by the community. But it does not remain captive to an insular local perspective. It thus operates in the dialectics of particularity (culture) and universality (gospel) as well as those of continuity (repetition, tradition) and change (innovation, transformation) with an anticipation of emancipation,

improvement and reconciled dwelling together of differences in global solidarity through hospitality, dialogue, humility, and justice.

This definition is centered on community. Mary McClintock Fulkerson, in her essay “‘We Don’t See Color Here’: A Case Study in Ecclesial-Cultural Invention,” shows beautifully how the Good Samaritan Methodist Church has constructed a self-identity of “Faithful Inclusiveness as Identity” through discussion and conversation.⁶⁸¹ She describes how the church members defined and identified themselves to a “new horizon” of a “faithful inclusive community,” drawn from different racial and cultural backgrounds and identities. In the same way as McClintock Fulkerson shows, doing Christian religious education in the community, for the community, and by the community supports the communal search for self-identification while at the same time moving toward new horizons of self-understanding and learning in relation to others. The following section will show how these goals can be met through the community metaphor of catachrestic Christian religious education.

IV. Metaphor of Catachrestic Christian Religious Education: Live Community

It is not necessary to suggest an entirely new metaphor for this approach to Christian religious education, as we already have enough rich metaphors in our repertoire.

Catachrestic Christian religious education seeks to eschew certain images/metaphors or paradigms that have been developed in the dominant Western ecclesiastical and academic traditions. That said, John H. Westerhoff III points out the need to provide a clear perspective of Christian religious education rooted in new metaphors. Hence, I would

⁶⁸¹ Fulkerson, “We Don’t See Color Here,” 140-157. See also Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). In her book Fulkerson develops this thought fully.

suggest that one of the metaphors by which we can develop a Christian religious education system for subaltern groups in India roots itself in a reconsidered community metaphor, which I call “live community.”

In the second chapter I discussed how the terms *saori* and *community* are synonymous for the Bodos and that community is their root metaphor. Although the notion of community is ubiquitous in the life of the Bodos, like their Chinese kin,⁶⁸² Bodos do not actually have an equivalent word in their language. Similarly, they do not have an exact equivalent to *individual*. However, they use a term *somaj*, an Assamese word that can be directly translated as “society,” to mean *community*, and *harsing* (“alone”) for *individual*. The absence of a direct translation for community does not undermine its primary importance among the Bodos.

For the Bodos, community is not defined in abstract terms but is the combination of the lived-experiences of its members. No single English term is comprehensive or nuanced enough. Heup Young Kim and David Ng point out that objective and abstract definitions require one to “step out of community.”⁶⁸³ But since the observer is part of the observed, and signifier is the part of the signified, a definition of community can never be genuinely objective. It is not possible to disentangle the object of consideration here from the act of observation. Because of such dynamic correlation, we cannot encapsulate the vitality of a community within a single definition, regardless of how comprehensive it might be.

Mindful of this, I wish to retain the use of community and employ it as a root

⁶⁸² Heup Young Kim and David Ng, “The Central Issue of Community: An Example of Asian North American Theology on the Way” in David Ng, ed., *People on the Way: Asian North Americans Discoveries of Christ, Culture, and Community* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1996), 26.

⁶⁸³ Kim and Ng, “Central Issue,” 34.

metaphor to convey *live community*. Live community is a dynamic and living community of people displaying continuity and change—that is, a collective sense of coherence rooted in shared semantic and semiotics, rites and rituals, worldviews and ethos and also in processes of social liberation and transformation. In the following sub-sections, I explain the four features of “live community” metaphor.

A. From Faith Community to Live Community Metaphor

This name is adapted from the faith community metaphor, which has been prominent in Christian religious education thanks in no small part to John H. Westerhoff III. While the faith community metaphor continues to be effective, the role and function of faith here has not been specifically defined by anyone except Westerhoff.⁶⁸⁴ Under this metaphor, faith seems to stand as a necessary qualification for a person to be part of a community. The faith community metaphor thus can promote exclusivity, privileging its members over others and promoting parochialism. It tends toward binary oppositions, such as between people of faith and people of non-faith, children of light and children of darkness, saved and unsaved, and chosen and not chosen etc. Consequently, it also has a tendency to see faith in a reified and simplistic manner, often abstractly or moralistically, thus overlooking complexities in the way communities live out and shift in their understandings of faith.⁶⁸⁵ For faith can mean different things to different people, even within the same ecclesiastical tradition. A church may have its own official statement of faith, but we cannot expect this to be the absolute yardstick for allegiance to it. In certain

⁶⁸⁴ For Westerhoff’s definition of “faith,” see John H. Westerhoff III, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1976).

⁶⁸⁵ Robert Schreiter, “Inculturation of Faith or Identification with Culture” in Norbert Greinacher and Robert Mente, eds., *Christianity and Culture* (SCM, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), 15-24.

Protestant churches faith is limited to a verbal confession of sin and acknowledgement of Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior. In such cases, those who cannot perform this verbal expression are excluded from the faith community. Hence, while the live community model does not disregard the value of faith and its importance to the personal life of every Christian, it rejects the idea that external displays of faith should be a defining factor of a community or a prerequisite to membership.

B. Live Community: Dwelling Together—Sense of Belongingness in Tradition

A live community may be described as a community of people dwelling together via shared “lived-experiences”⁶⁸⁶ and a sense of belonging. It signifies a community bound together by “a shared situation or ‘lifeworld’ and its particular exigencies” in which “local economics of various sorts take shape and circulate values and goods in distinct interactive patterns.”⁶⁸⁷ A lifeworld is always a communal world that involves being with other people, who are joined together in matrixes of exchange.⁶⁸⁸ A live community can be highly sophisticated in organization but it can also be disjunctive and disorderly. Either way, it outlines a community built upon customs and values, signs and symbols, and thoughts and actions, regardless of how relative and transitive those might be, that are in some sense shared and valued as sources of being together. Live community thus

⁶⁸⁶ See Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, “Creating a Liberating Culture: Latinas’ Subversive Narrative” in Delwin Brown et al., eds., *Conversing on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 122-139. Isasi-Diaz argues for the hyphenated use of “lived-experience” to signify the inseparability of thought and action, and belief and action.

⁶⁸⁷ See Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, Chapter Three. Following Alfred Schultz’s in George Walsh’ work, Reynolds describes communal belonging as relying on a shared “lifeworld.” See also Schultz, *The Structure of Life-world*, trans. George Walsh et al., (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1967).

⁶⁸⁸ Gadamer, *Truth*, 246-248. Echoing Husserl, Gadamer talks about “life-world” in “Overcoming the Epistemological Problem.” Gadamer finds similar line of thoughts in the works of A. Schultz, G. Brand, U. Glaesgens, K. Dising, P. Jansen, and others.

entails social structures and norms that “become ensconced and outline the contours of the way of life, a corporate gestalt, a culture,” in and through a “social grammar that elicits the possibility of dwelling together, summoning commitments and allegiance that endow the relationship and events of ordinary life, past and future with purpose and significance.”⁶⁸⁹ For the Bodos, as we have seen in Chapter Two, this manifests itself through saori. In saori, a “generative and integrative force” takes place; wherein the community finds resources for sharing an ongoing life together, within what Reynolds calls a “field of semantic power.”⁶⁹⁰ Fields of semantic power create a sense of belonging amidst lived-experiences. This has dramatic implications for Christian religious education.

In recent decades there has been renewed interest in community-based Christian religious education, particularly in the West. Apart from Westerhoff, Charles R. Foster, and Norma Cook Everist,⁶⁹¹ among many other authors, have presented educational models along these lines. Gabriel Moran suggests that, of the four agents of education in the West—family, church, school, and apprenticeship—school gained primacy after Dewey’s 1900 essay “The Child and the Curriculum,” which resulted in decreased emphasis on family and church.⁶⁹² Despite this, he notes that family remained “the first and in many respects the most important educational influence on children” and that “the church was by far the most widespread voluntary organization in the United States.”⁶⁹³

⁶⁸⁹ Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, 79.

⁶⁹⁰ Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, 83.

⁶⁹¹ For community model of Christian education, see Charles R. Foster, *Teaching in the Community of Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982), Charles R. Foster, *Educating Congregations: the future of Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), and Norma Cook Everist, *The Church as Learning Community: A Comprehensive Guide to Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002).

⁶⁹² Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran, *Reshaping Religious Education: Conversation on Contemporary Practice* (Louis Ville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 16.

⁶⁹³ Harris and Moran, *Reshaping*, 17.

As a result of such observations there has been renewed emphasis on the role of family and church (community) in Christian religious education.

Because any metaphor or paradigm will change depending on context, we need to look at them catachrestically. In the Western context family and community (of which the church is an example) are understood in relation to individualism, while in Asian and African cultures, they are central to human existence. In those contexts an emphasis on family and community is largely a reiteration of traditional norms and values rather than a significant break or change. It demonstrates the operative pull of certain fields of semantic power, which binds people together in community.

Live community-based Christian religious education seeks to discern such fields of semantic power, affirming and upholding the cherished cultural and social values of a community and nurturing them in continuity with their roots in shared traditions. Christian religious education in the live community metaphor includes education for and by community “where learning and values are reflected in the shared life of the community,”⁶⁹⁴ within or among various ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups. The live community always operates in dialectical tension between memory (past) and vision (future), providing substance to an ongoing life together.

C. Live Community: A Liberating Community—A Community Beyond Closure

A live community of belonging and binding can be oppressive within a family and community, because, no family or community exists without power relations among differences. At the same time a live community is a tradition-bearing community, it must

⁶⁹⁴ Pazmino, *Foundational*, 47.

also be a liberative community that exists “beyond closure.”⁶⁹⁵ It is both liberating and in the process of being liberated. Although a live community is a tradition-bearing community, there are areas where any community undergoes or requires transformation and social change from within and without. Tradition is not simply a permanent precondition, but is produced through acts of understanding and appropriation, which propel forward its evolution.⁶⁹⁶ Tradition is a human production that is constantly evolving as communities participate in it. A living community is always dynamic. Its traditions “are communal formation of temporal depth, arising from the past and extending into anticipated future.”⁶⁹⁷ A live community, as a liberating community, is thus always open-ended. It is a community beyond closure with an anticipation of “necessary improvisation,”⁶⁹⁸ through dialogical praxis situated between past and present and in light of an orientation toward the future.

The notion of liberation, in both theology and pedagogy, is important precisely at this point. It aspires to social change in light of past and present inequities and power asymmetries. With reference to a catachrestic Christian religious education in the integrative model, I seek to use the live community metaphor to support liberation through the dialectical integration of continuity and change. Sometimes change may be painful and at times it may be violent. However, it is important to reiterate and emphasize that any continuity or transformative change has to be from the community, for the community, and by the community. Catachrestic Christian religious education, thus, maintains the liberation motif in both education and theology to foster openness or non-

⁶⁹⁵ Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, 85-87.

⁶⁹⁶ Gadamer, *Truth*, 293.

⁶⁹⁷ Gadamer, *Truth*, 84.

⁶⁹⁸ I referred to Bourdieu’s “necessary improvisation” in Chapter Three. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 8.

closure and promote justice and equality in and for community.

In this process, it is important to keep empowerment and enfranchisement as central foci. This can be achieved through the teaching ministry of advocacy (*propheta*) and through the ministry of service/action (*diakonia*). These serve as the basis for an ethico-political agenda in the teaching/learning ministry of the church. Advocacy in the teaching ministry of the church involves naming and critiquing evil socio-economic and political practices and denouncing their consequences. Service or action is its correlate, actively resisting injustice and working toward change. Such ministry cannot be politically neutral. It raises a voice against oppression and exploitation found both outside of and within the church.

While the goal of teaching and learning ministry under the live community metaphor is to affirm and sustain positive social and cultural values, the goal of advocacy or the prophetic aspect of ministry under the liberation paradigm is to cultivate transformation in socio-economic-political and cultural structures that are oppressive and exploitative. Advocacy invokes hope but not in an idealistic sense. It endeavours to establish justice, peace, and righteousness among people and communities and to support the integrity of creation. It develops critical lessons for Christian religious education aimed at deconstructing unjust socio-political ideologies and their fields of semantic power, carrying out the educational ministry of the church in an “articulation-action-reflection” mode.⁶⁹⁹ This is done in service to God’s people, not with paternalistic and benevolent attitudes but among equals in solidarity with one another.

We can include proclamation within the broader purview of the liberation paradigm, particularly the proclamation of “good news” to the poor (poor in both the

⁶⁹⁹ Bevans, *Models*, 70-76.

material and spiritual senses). Liberation as a narrative still provides hope to millions of people who face institutional and personal oppression and violence.⁷⁰⁰ As both liberation and postcolonial theology take the other seriously, they offer “good news” for the poor. However, unlike liberation theology, postcolonialism does not perceive the “other,” the poor, as a homogeneous category. Instead, it acknowledges multiple and hybrid identities based on sex, ethnicity, and gender (among other things)⁷⁰¹ and, as we have seen, moves away from binary oppositions like oppressed/oppressor, as groups often cannot strictly be located in a singular position on either pole. Postcolonial educational practices address the existential issues of internal or external domination and oppression on both personal and institutional levels.

D. Live Community: A Community of Sharing Differences in Dialectical Integration

The understanding of discourses/texts within the context of a particular community and ecclesiastical background plays a major role in the processes of Christian religious education. Gadamer rightly asserts that “*all such understanding is ultimately self-understanding*, [sichverstehen; knowing one’s own way around],”⁷⁰² whether it is at an intersubjective, communal, or ecclesiastical level. Since “my” and “our” understanding is self-understanding, it is always limited and finite, which Gadamer sees as an historically situated mode of being present that frames both teacher and learner.⁷⁰³ This is where Reynolds’ notion of “dialectical pluralism” becomes relevant not only for community but also for Christian pedagogy. A live community rooted in practices of sharing differences

⁷⁰⁰ R. S. Sugirtharaja, *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 259-263.

⁷⁰¹ Pazmino, *Foundational*, 260.

⁷⁰² Gadamer, *Truth*, 261. Italics are in the original text.

⁷⁰³ Gadamer, *Truth*, 261.

dialectically both retrieves positive values from the past cultural signs and symbols and sees the positive values of alternative perspectives within the community and between self and other. Any act of understanding always implies difference, and becomes more meaningful and richer only in relation to another contrasting factor. It is in relation to others that we self-reflexively discover ourselves and thus become more open to new possibilities. Contrast, of course, does not mean separation, isolation, or dismemberment; rather it is a source of new challenges and possibilities that creates variety and novelty. A live community operating in dialectical pluralism does not exclude others by way of monolithic and monological discourse, lest it perpetuate epistemic violence, but values the differences in others. Reynolds explains:

[Communities], as conventional, are never insular entities but are self-transcending and liminal, opened to more than themselves, existing in the interstices, on the margins. And margins, as boundary zones, are not barriers or lines of demarcation that separate; instead they are crisscrossing spaces of interrelationships, of overlapping and mutually trespassing contents, windows whereby we are opened up beyond ourselves and onto the other.⁷⁰⁴

Dialectical integration, then, builds upon this dynamic relational understanding of communities to highlight points of engagement between differences that open up new possibilities for understanding and liberative praxis together. Now the question we need to ask is: what are the contexts of teaching/learning in live community metaphor? The next section will address this question.

E. Contexts of Live Community Learning

In Chapter Two I have discussed how familial saoris operated within the contexts of families of same ethnic and linguistic communities and how corporate saoris operated

⁷⁰⁴ Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, 103.

within different ethnic and linguistic communities. Bodos learned templates of solidarity, reciprocity, mutual help and cooperation in and through the participation of familial and corporate saoris. Therefore, it is quite natural that such contexts are reinvigorated for Christian religious education in Bodo churches. Following the contexts in which saoris operated for catachrestic Christian religious education in an integrative model, I propose three contexts for teaching and learning for the Bodo churches: family, church or mid community, and wider or global community.

Over the last decades the nature and understanding of family has been changing, particularly in the West. However, among the Bodo communities the role of family in teaching moral values still remains predominant, although we cannot idealize and romanticize its role. Family is not universally virtuous. Therefore, despite different and ever-changing understandings of family, with their limitations, family can be still considered as the first context for Christian religious education in the Bodo churches.⁷⁰⁵ It's not only among Bodo churches, but as Moran contends, even in North America (a predominantly individualistic society), family has remained the first and, in many respects, the most important agent of education.⁷⁰⁶ Alan Bloom observes that the family once played a crucial intermediary role between individual and society by providing a quasi-natural attachment, but now the unintended and unexpected decline of family values has fostered dis-attachment by promoting individualism.⁷⁰⁷ Even so, however, the family remains a key link between individual and community.

⁷⁰⁵ John H. Westerhoff III, *Living the Faith Community: The Church that Makes Difference* (San Francisco, Cal.: Harper & Row, 1985), 7.

⁷⁰⁶ Harris and Moran, *Reshaping*, 16. Here Moran's finding in North American context is referred as an example and not as a model for the Bodo context.

⁷⁰⁷ Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 86.

After the family, I suggest the church or mid-community as the second context for educational setting. For live community church is the foundational and central unit of community life.⁷⁰⁸ We are created in God's image so that we can live in community in relationship with God and with one another. This relationship is for cultivating, preserving and humanizing God's creativity in and through us in community. This relationship extends to the redemption of the world and to promote justice and peace in the world. To live a life of friendship with God in fullness and ever deepening and loving intimacy is profoundly relational.⁷⁰⁹

In fact, "one Christian is no Christian, and there can be no health, no wholeness and holiness, outside of community."⁷¹⁰ Human beings are created for community. In other words, as imaged in likeness to God's triune figuration, human life is relational to the core. Because of this, so also is Christian religious education. For our health, wholeness, and holiness we are dependent on one another, joined in a nexus of relationships and exchanges that root us in shared traditions and values.

The third context is what I call the wider community or global community, where all differences are included in a circle of belonging. There is no doubt that family and community, particularly that of the live community, are the starting point of our learning. However, as we live in a polyphonic world we must be open to other traditions to extend our horizons of learning and for global solidarity in hospitality, dialogue, and justice, as "no congregation [community] is an island in itself."⁷¹¹ We are connected and inter-connected with others in various ways, crossing linguistic, geographical, ethnic, class,

⁷⁰⁸ Westerhoff, *Living the Faith*, 9.

⁷⁰⁹ Westerhoff, *Living the Faith*, 9.

⁷¹⁰ Westerhoff, *Living the Faith*, 15.

⁷¹¹ Everist, *Church as Learning*, 21.

caste, and gender boundaries. As cultural confluence occurs in consensual and conflictual ways,⁷¹² so too does education take place. The key element of teaching/learning in a multicultural context is negotiation/dialogue and not negation.⁷¹³ It is a negotiation/dialogue based not on binaries between oppositions but on differences engaging one another within an interstitial space,⁷¹⁴ in the midst of various contesting and confluent voices. Thus family, church, and the global community are the basic contexts of learning in the live community metaphor. And each context involves a dialectical integration of differences.

While a great deal of time has been spent discussing the importance of community to Christian religious education, this should not be mistaken for ignorance of the necessity of being alone for meditation and contemplation. We can refer to what Westerhoff and Eusden call being “alone,”⁷¹⁵ a meditative space that itself can only occur in the context of a Christian community of learners. Our lives are a constant combination of being alone and being together. In Christianity we often use the term *contemplation* to convey a solitary meditative space, and thinkers such as Thomas Merton have devoted considerable time to it.⁷¹⁶ Merton explains contemplation as follows:

Contemplation is the sudden intuitive penetration of what really Is. It is an unexpected leap of the spirit of a man into the existential luminosity of Reality Itself, not merely by the metaphysical intuition of being, but by the transcendent fulfillment of an existential communion with Him, Who Is.⁷¹⁷

⁷¹² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 2.

⁷¹³ Leona M. English, “Third- Space Practitioners: Women Educating for Justice in the Global South” in *Adult Education Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 2, February, 2005, 89- 92. See also Bhabha, *Location*, 37.

⁷¹⁴ Bhabha, *Location*, 2.

⁷¹⁵ John H. Westerhoff III and John D. Eusden, *The Spiritual Life: Learning East and West* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), 83-99.

⁷¹⁶ See Thomas Merton, *The New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Direction Publishing House, 1962). I find Merton’s thoughts on contemplation to be very thorough.

⁷¹⁷ Thomas Merton, *The New Men* (London: Burns and Oates, 1976), 9-10.

Merton further explains, “Contemplation is a sudden gift of awareness, an awakening to the Real within all that is real.”⁷¹⁸ In this awareness one is being existentially “touched by God.”⁷¹⁹ Contemplation is also the highest expression of human intellectual and spiritual life. It is a spiritual wonder.⁷²⁰ In contemplation we know by “unknowing,” or, better yet, we know *beyond* all knowing or “unknowing.”⁷²¹ Contemplation is also a foretaste of the definitive victory of life over death in our soul. It is the highest and most paradoxical form of self-realization.⁷²² For Merton then, contemplation is not a philosophical concept, nor a metaphysical awareness, but a religious apprehension of God by being “sons” and “daughters” of God who are “born anew.”⁷²³ In and through contemplation God enlightens our minds and hearts. The divine awakens us through sacred words and Spirit.⁷²⁴ Being alone and practicing contemplation is necessary in this technology-driven, stressful, busy life. It balances the active life in community.

V. Methods of Catachrestic Catechesis in an Integrative Model

Catachresis is a method, goal, and process of Christian religious education under the integrative model. Both teachers and learners are encouraged to approach religious texts/discourses catachrestically through contrapuntal readings. Lesson planning and preparation is done catachrestically in a dialectical way, with an understanding of “our”

⁷¹⁸ Merton, *New Seeds*, 3.

⁷¹⁹ Merton, *New Seeds*, 3.

⁷²⁰ Merton, *New Seeds*, 1.

⁷²¹ Merton, *New Seeds*, 2.

⁷²² Merton, *New Man*, 13.

⁷²³ Merton, *New Man*, 13.

⁷²⁴ Merton, *New Seeds*, 4-5.

text/discourse/narrative serving as the basis of developing outward-facing social bonds through conversation and dialogue. Catachrestic catechesis does not make presumptions about any text or discourse, but reads them all catachrestically by intentionally wresting, reconstructing and reconfiguring particular images, ideas, and theoretical strategies from dominant texts/discourses to offer a way to rework and expand terms and knowledge—that is, using paradoxes and disruptive metaphors and meanings to offer transformative intervention. This is also how preparation for reading and analysis is done. Groome suggests that, when it comes to teaching in a pastoral context, particularly when it is done through inculturation, technical method (*techne*) is not as important as practical wisdom (*phronesis*).⁷²⁵ However, in a community-based model of learning, community itself is both goal and method. Method goes beyond mere technique; it draws from the cultural touchstones of the community. Therefore, I propose the following specific methods in carrying out catachrestic catechesis under the integrative model.

A. Intercultural Inculturation: Method of Teaching/Learning and Mode of Communication

This study has been primarily concerned with culture in pedagogy. The technical term used for the role of culture in Christianity, in theology, mission, liturgy, and education/catechesis, whether Catholic or Protestant, is *enculturation* or *inculturation*. According to G. De Napoli, it was G. L. Barney, a Protestant missionary professor at Nyack Alliance School of Theology, New York, who first introduced the term *inculturation* in missions

⁷²⁵ Groome, “Inculturation,” 120-133.

in 1973, stressing the need to emphasize the supracultural and supracontextual components of the gospel in encounters with new culture.⁷²⁶ Writers have employed the term generally to emphasize how culture is the fertile ground in which the seed of the gospel is nourished and grows. But the term is quite nuanced.

Among Protestant Christian pedagogues, Westerhoff made an important transition from the concept of “socialization” to “enculturation”⁷²⁷ as both goal and method of Christian religious education in the faith community paradigm. Westerhoff defines religious socialization as follows: *Religious socialization as a process consisting of lifelong formal and informal mechanisms, through which persons sustain and transmit their faith (world view, value system) and life style.*⁷²⁸ This goal is accomplished, he argues, through participation in the life of a tradition-bearing community.⁷²⁹ In his later works, Westerhoff adopted enculturation as an educational goal and method for Christian religious education. Differentiating between socialization and enculturation, he notes that while socialization emphasizes the environment, experiences, and actions of others as an influence on individuals, enculturation emphasizes interactions among persons of all ages.⁷³⁰ In enculturation “one person is not understood as an actor and another acted upon, but rather both act, both initiate action, and both interact.”⁷³¹ Through it, people

⁷²⁶ Anscar J. Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation, Sacramental, Religiosity and Catechesis* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1992), 25.

⁷²⁷ Westerhoff, *Will Our*, 80.

⁷²⁸ John H. Westerhoff III and Gwen Kennedy Neville, *Generation to Generation: Conversations on Religious Education and Culture* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1974), 41. Italics are in the original text.

⁷²⁹ Westerhoff and Neville, *Generation to Generation*, 41.

⁷³⁰ Westerhoff, *Will Our*, 80.

⁷³¹ Westerhoff, *Will Our*, 80.

learn from one another in an interactive process. It as a goal and process emphasizes on the “being” rather than the “having or doing”⁷³² of a person.

In Catholicism, Anscar J. Chupungco brought the term to prominence in discussions of liturgy and catechesis, observing its importance in missiological circles after Pope John Paul II introduced it in an official document in 1979. Chupungco further notes the Pope's concern for the relationship between catechesis and culture, and how this invokes an incarnational approach. Thus, quoting John Paul II, Chupungco writes, “genuine catechesists know that catechesis ‘takes flesh’ in the various cultures and milieux.”⁷³³ As God becomes incarnate in human form, so too does the gospel become incarnate in cultural forms. With this in mind, Chupungco also makes a distinction between socialization and inculturation on theological grounds. He comments that although “enculturation is in fact an anthropological jargon for socialization,”⁷³⁴ the term has developed meaning beyond socialization or even acculturation in missiological and catechetical circles. Chupungco sees the term *inculturation* in both liturgical and catechetical contexts as advancement from various concepts such as indigenization, incarnation, contextualization, adaptation, and acculturation.⁷³⁵ When it comes to the importance of culture in relation to both catechetical and liturgical practices, inculturation is preferable in terms of both method and goal. It builds from culture as the fertile soil from which the gospel may be understood and also fulfills culture in the end, transforming it from within.

⁷³² John H. Westerhoff III, *Building God's People in a Materialistic World* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1983), 18.

⁷³³ Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation*, 26.

⁷³⁴ Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation*, 26.

⁷³⁵ Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation*, 13-31.

Following Aylward Shorter, Chupungco prefers inculturation to acculturation. He defines acculturation as “the encounter between one culture and another, or the encounter between two cultures,” in which neither culture undergoes drastic change or meaningful assimilation; instead, the two are on equal footing with mutual respect and tolerance. Conversely, inculturation is defined as “the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures.” He calls attention to three important traits: (1) inculturation is an ongoing process; (2) Christian faith cannot exist except in a cultural form; and (3) there has to be interaction and reciprocal assimilation between Christian faith and culture. He summarizes inculturation with the formula $A+B=C$, where both A and B are transformed into C without losing their identities.⁷³⁶ However, how A and B are transformed into C without losing their identities is not well articulated.

Postcolonial theory suggests a number of critical issues with both Westerhoff's and Chupungco's definitions. First, while it can be observed that cultures may be transformed from within and from outside themselves and still maintain their identities, it is unclear how A and B become C, or, indeed, what C is. The equation is appealing in its elegance, but ultimately dissatisfying. In certain ecclesiastical traditions, particularly Roman Catholic, C can be a foregone conclusion that precludes other alternative possibilities from emerging. Orlando O. Espin succinctly explains:

[Inculturation] supposes a “canonical something” that exists independent of a culture and that can be “poured” or “transmitted” into other cultures. The canonical something supposed by inculturation assumes, furthermore, an interpretation or understanding possible only within, and from within, a dominant culture, because canonical something does not interpret itself, and therefore, does not understand or proclaim itself (or by itself) as canonical [...]. Inculturation, consequently, includes the possibility, and perhaps the reality, of colonization.⁷³⁷

⁷³⁶ Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation*, 27-30.

⁷³⁷ Espin, *Grace*, 15.

The connection with colonialism is noteworthy, given Bodo experiences of cultural degradation under the banner of canonical Christianity in Western frames.

Second, as long as inculturation theology maintains the notion that the Christian gospel or faith is supracultural or supracontextual it maintains a problematic hierarchy and implicitly supports the assimilation of other cultures into a Christian culture defined by one culture against others.⁷³⁸ The result is an imperialistic urge to domesticate differences that inevitably targets and harms minorities. The dominant interpretation of faith becomes normative for all, assuming a pure and original status that is actually itself merely one cultural interpretation among others that has risen to prominence. There is never an interpretation of the gospel that is not already a cultural interpretation.

Third, Letty M. Russell, in her essay entitled “Cultural Hermeneutics: A Postcolonial Look at Mission”⁷³⁹ points out that male-dominated inculturation theology has failed to address the issue of patriarchy and consequently oppression against women persists, particularly in Africa. In response to this she has suggested a “gendered cultural hermeneutics,” differentiating from inculturation theology.⁷⁴⁰ Ultimately, whether it is deployed in theology, hermeneutics, or pedagogy, inculturation methodologies are inadequate to carry out liberative praxis. Their focus is on the relevance of particular cultural values and practices for transmitting the gospel and not so much on social structures and related dynamics of power. Transformation thus tends to involve matters of meaning and understanding rather than political or economic change.

⁷³⁸ Strictly speaking there is no so-called Christian culture. However, since Christianity has predominantly influenced Western culture, it is considered as Christian culture. However, many scholars, among whom Kathryn Tanner is included, have contested it.

⁷³⁹ Letty M. Russell, “Cultural Hermeneutics: A Postcolonial Look at Mission” in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol.1, no.1 Spring (Baltimore: Scholars Press, 1985), 202-227.

⁷⁴⁰ See Russell, “Cultural Hermeneutics,” 202- 227. Following Kanyoro and other African women theologians, Russell argues that inculturation does not yet lead to liberation of women in Africa.

Finally, inculturation is always discussed in terms of one culture (or Christian culture) against another. However, in a pluralistic society and a multifaith context cultural encounters are much more complex and multidimensional and considering one-on-one encounters has no benefit. In fact, as we have seen, culture itself is not a bounded whole but rather is a site of multiple and contesting fields of interaction between differences. Culture is never a monolithic “A” that simply engages with another frame of reference “B”; rather there are already other references within “A” that make it a hybrid construct already pluralized from within.

Therefore, in light of postmodern and postcolonial concerns and the limitations of inculturation, and following Robert Schreiter’s notion of intercultural hermeneutics, I propose *intercultural inculturation* as the method and goal of catachrestic Christian religious education under the integrative model. Intercultural inculturation highlights the dialogical nature of cultural formation and engagement. Accordingly, I define intercultural inculturation as a creative and dynamic encounter between Christian message/faith and other different cultures in a space of “inter” or “in-between” in the interstitial or “third space” with mutual respect and recognition. It recognizes the ambiguity of culture as a construct and yet actively embraces the similarities and differences between cultural frameworks to promote growth and solidarity through hospitality, dialogue, and reciprocity. Stressing the “inter” or in-between dynamic, an intercultural inculturation approach to other cultures is characterized by meaningful encounter and engagement through dialogue. In other words, other cultures are engaged dialogically and creatively as equals and partners in their teaching and learning process.

In a subaltern context, the retrieval of erased and disavowed cultural elements is a part of the process.

Intercultural inculturation does not merely juxtapose cultural differences on an abstract equal footing as isolated fields of meaning and practice; rather, it encourages mutual respect and equitable reciprocity. It always views cultures not in terms of polarization between dominant and periphery but through a mutual recognition of all positions and their need for mutual transformation. In the process of encounter and engagement, cultures are transformed through mutual recognition of and respect for one another's differences, which opens up new possibilities for understanding both self and other.

Consequently, in intercultural inculturation, communication and interpretation take place neither in the interlocutor/teacher's culture nor in the receiver/learner's, but rather in an interstitial space of conversation/dialogue. As Gadamer asserts, the true "locus of hermeneutics is this in-betweeness."⁷⁴¹ Therefore no one can make an exclusive claim for dominance over other in the process. With regards to the analysis of texts/discourses or creeds, even if both the teacher and the learner come from same culture and background, intercultural inculturation does not assume that they will arrive at the same meaning, because every understanding is a different understanding. In the words of Gadamer, it "is enough to say that we understand in *different way, if we understand at all.*"⁷⁴²

In a multifaith or multicultural context a Christian culture or community encounters different cultures/communities simultaneously in the same space. In

⁷⁴¹ Gadamer, *Truth*, 295.

⁷⁴² Gadamer, *Truth*, 297. Italics are in the original text.

intercultural processes, mutuality and reciprocity of influence run through the exchange based, negotiating multiple perspectives and different traditions synthetically in conversation/dialogue.⁷⁴³ Through this encounter and engagement each culture/community influences the others and they are transformed together while at the same time maintaining their own identities and traditions. So the end product of intercultural inculturation is “the same-yet-not-the same, different-but-not different.”⁷⁴⁴

B. Experiential Learning: Action/Saori and Reflection/Saorai in Praxis

Experiential learning through action and reflection is the second method and process of teaching and learning in catachrestic catechesis. In this study I am interested in both individual and community experience in a general sense and the experience of subaltern and marginalized groups particularly. Catachrestic Christian religious education in an integrative model, executed through action (saori) and reflection (saorai), will result in experiential learning where the experiences of individuals and the community become key to teaching and learning. Experience, action and reflection are intrinsically connected, mutually inclusive, and cyclical.⁷⁴⁵

By action we gain experience and experience helps provide the context to guide our actions. Through our experiences we narrate our faith and transmit it to younger generations. A community’s “modes of feeling, thinking, and acting are passed on from one generation to another generation through experience in a social context” and faith, love, and care are fostered, developed, and transmitted in and through community

⁷⁴³ Bevans, *Models*, 88-102.

⁷⁴⁴ Spivak, *Critique*, 340.

⁷⁴⁵ See John H. Westerhoff III, *Living the Faith* 85.

experiences. Thus, Westerhoff continues, experience plays an important role in the “framing, development and sustenance of faith and life.”⁷⁴⁶ He also specifically talks about the importance of experience to Christian religious education:

When the meaning of numerous acts, experiences, and events are put together, consciously and unconsciously, in an overall view of life, we have the worldview out of which we act and reflect on all future acts and experiences. Experience, therefore, is a key to both formation and expression of our faith.⁷⁴⁷

In Chapter Two, I discussed how Bodos gained modes of feeling, thinking and acting through the concept and practice of *saori* that fostered solidarity, reciprocity, mutual help and care among the communities through experiences in a chain of action and reflection. I deliberately opted not to explain the etymology of the term *saori* (action) in the second chapter so that it could be discussed here along with the term *saorai*, (reflection) with which it is always associated, in a dialectical way. *Saorai* generally means discussion, deliberation, conversation and/or reflection. It also means conversation/dialogue. Both terms originate from the root word *sao*, (*saonai*) which can be defined as “burn.” In *saori*, the suffix “ri” is derived from *ari* (*aroi*) or *hari* or *mahari* (*jat*, *jati*, or *samproday* in Assamese, or *gotra* in Hindi), meaning “people, folk,”⁷⁴⁸ community, “clan,” “kinship”⁷⁴⁹ or even “ethnic group.” Consequently, most Bodo family names carry the suffix “-ari” (e.g., Daimari, Basumatari, Mochahari, or Swargiari). Therefore, etymologically, *saori* means, “burn out community” or “physically burn out community at/with work.” True to this meaning, in a *saori* people work from

⁷⁴⁶ Westerhoff and Neville, *Generation to Generation*, 85.

⁷⁴⁷ Westerhoff and Neville, *Generation to Generation*, 85.

⁷⁴⁸ Sidney Endle, *The Kacharis* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1911), 24-28.

⁷⁴⁹ Brahma, *Study of*, 34.

dawn to dusk, especially in a house construction saori. At the end of the day, when they are worn out and burned out, they enjoy a feast together. On the other hand the suffix “-rai” in *saorai* literally means “rebuke” (*rainai* or *bwrabnai*). It can also be interpreted simply as “talk” (as in *rai-jlainai*), “discussion,” “conversation,” “deliberation,” or even “a verdict.” So saorai has to do with the “burn out” in conversation, discussion, and reflective deliberation as a community. While saori involves rigorous physical work, saorai involves rigorous mental exercise. It is the reflection on the action/work of saori. The two are mutually dependent on one another and are inseparable. The act of discussion, conversation, and deliberation with reflection is called *saorai mell* in Bodo, and it was traditionally a community affair. Bodo community life alternated between saori and saorai, action and reflection, and teaching and learning also took place in the context of this dialectical cycle.⁷⁵⁰

As the Bodo communities’ teaching and learning took place mainly through action (saori) and reflection (saorai), this method needs to be emphasized in catachrestic Christian religious education for the Bodo churches. The present schooling-instruction paradigm employed in Sunday schools, an individualistic approach, has undoubtedly been able to provide cognitive knowledge of faith to learners; however, this needs to be translated into practice. There should be a balance between cognitive learning and experience in the Bodo context.

My emphasis regarding experiential learning has been community experience, not individual experience. Regardless of what kind of experiential learning is being considered, we must be aware of its finitude and situatedness. Our experiences are historically located and culturally conditioned, and we must be careful in several ways.

⁷⁵⁰ See Westerhoff, *Living the Faith*, 85.

First, when dealing with community experience, we must always be careful that we do not perpetuate exclusion and domination if there are people from different communities in a congregation. If a teacher or a text/discourse being studied is from a dominant group, care must be taken to not silence others experiences (or even appear to do so), lest a notion of hierarchical spiritual knowledge be perpetuated. One must be sensitive to the cultural plurality and differing power structures operating in a community, and conduct oneself with an aspiration towards *hospitality*.

Second, care must also be taken, particularly on the part of the teacher; to not convey the idea that one's experience takes priority over against others as "more authentic-than-thou."⁷⁵¹ Whether on a community or individual level the notion of authentic experience is always in danger of romanticization. Knowledge gained from an individual's experience or a particular community's experience within the larger social milieu is always subjective and thus it must not be imposed as a norm for others. To this end, our pedagogy must reflect *humility* and *justice*.⁷⁵²

Third, Christian pedagogues must be careful during cultural analysis to maintain a delicate and ever-shifting balance between the analysis of experiences as lived culture and the textual and historical discourses of faith/creed/doctrines at the disposal of the church. There must always be *conversation/dialogue* between these. Although catachrestic catechesis in the integrative model gives primary importance to subaltern experience, it does not ignore the importance of text or discourse, including those that are from mainstream. It does, however, always scrutinize them catachrestically.

⁷⁵¹ Mohanty, "On Race and Voice," 145-166.

⁷⁵² How humility and justice can be reflected in Christian religious education will be discussed in Chapter Six.

C. Narrative or Narrativization: Method-Content of Teaching/Learning

The third method that I propose is narrative or narrativization. Of late, narrative or narrativization has become popular in academic circles as tools for teaching and learning. This, and specific examples like “grand/metanarrative” and “development narrative” have already been discussed in this study. In this section, I am using narrative or narrativization, or simply story-telling to refer to both one of the teaching/learning methods of catachrestic Christian religious education and the inclusion of mythico-historical and lived-experience of subaltern narratives in this education alongside biblical narratives. Narrative serves as a method-content in doing Christian religious education.

Any given community always has stories to narrate. Westerhoff collectively refers to these as “common memory.”⁷⁵³ The nature and identity, and the cultural and moral life and even the worldview of a community depend on such narratives. These stories are also enacted and re-enacted through worship and ritualized in community life. Explaining the importance of stories to community life, Westerhoff writes, “[We] all need a story. Stories are reality. Stories provide us with both a memory linking us meaningfully to the past and a vision calling us to a purposeful future.”⁷⁵⁴

A sacred story is inevitable for a community. It is used to explain the meaning and purpose of life and is transmitted through generations through telling and retelling with different interpretations and challenges. It can even be done through drama, art, dances, or hymns. As a community is an embodiment of the past, present, and future, narrative reveals the history of a community and its faith and at the same time provides “common

⁷⁵³ Westerhoff, *Living the Faith*, 27.

⁷⁵⁴ Westerhoff, *Living the Faith*, 28.

vision”⁷⁵⁵ for the future. This helps us to know and read ourselves in new and different ways. Narrative puts sinews and flesh on the dry bones of reason and creed.⁷⁵⁶ It helps us to sing new song or even an “old song” in different ways. In Christianity, the story of the life and work of Jesus Christ is central. Christian communities can see this story as a meta-story, in light of which they narrate and enact in different ways their unique micro-stories. Narrativization reincarnates the cultural life of a community and helps to educate the younger generations. Narrational pedagogical method, according to Westerhoff, involves a common memory, a common vision, the story of God's action in history, and the story of church's continuing struggle to make sense of God's story and to live it.⁷⁵⁷ To this I add a culture's unique stories, generationally passed down through common memory. As was discussed in Chapter One, the story or narrative of the subaltern groups serves as the liminality or threshold of the people with a double inscription of pedagogical objects/contents and performative subjects/agency. In this section I have described three specific methods—intercultural inculturation, experiential learning and narrative or narrativization—for doing catachrestic Christian religious education. The following section will address how this model can be viewed theologically and incorporated into the integrative model.

VI. Theological Approach to Catachrestic Christian Religious Education

In the fourth chapter I discussed how Christian religious education has always been linked with theology and hermeneutics and how the theology of Western churches

⁷⁵⁵ Westerhoff, *Living the Faith*, 28-29.

⁷⁵⁶ Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, “Creating a Liberative Culture” in Brawn et al., eds., *Conversing on Culture*, 122-139.

⁷⁵⁷ Westerhoff, *Living the Faith*, 28-30.

continues to be a powerful force in their former colonies, even after territorial decolonization. In developing a catachrestic approach to Christian religious education for postcolonial contexts, it is necessary to explore what sort of theological approach will best support our goals. I agree with Seymour and Miller that we must continually explore the “foundational relationship of Christian education to both educational theory and theology,”⁷⁵⁸ as well as to consider what can be learned from other disciplines. However, this is not to imply that Christian religious education, as Sara Little objects, is an inherently imperialistic enterprise that dominates ties with other disciplines.⁷⁵⁹ The approach I wish to advocate is an interdisciplinary, one of mutual recognition and appreciation between knowledge bases rather than competition. In similar line catachrestic Christian religious education in an integrative/saorian model must attempt to engage productively the postcolonial and postmodern theories in order to transform its approaches.

It has been suggested that the emphasis of theology should shift from election to covenant, redemption to creation, and systematic/classical theologies to contextual theologies in the wake of transformations that critique these classical theologies as imperialistic, triumphalistic, patriarchal, and hegemonic. Such suggestions can be found in various essays in *Theological Approaches to Christian Education*.⁷⁶⁰ Catachrestic catechesis under the integrative model still cherishes such shifts in emphasis while recognizing that the mere polarization of theological position will not suffice in doing

⁷⁵⁸ Jack L. Seymour and Donald E. Miller, eds., *Theological Approaches to Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 153-163.

⁷⁵⁹ Sara Little argues that if education manifests in whole life and work, including worship, then education becomes imperialistic. See Sara Little, “Religious Instruction” in Seymour and Miller, eds., *Contemporary Approaches to Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982), 37-38.

⁷⁶⁰ Authors/Writers have suggested various theological approaches to Christian education in Seymour and Miller, eds., *Theological Approaches to Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).

Christian religious education in postcolonial contexts. Keeping in mind the dialectical integration approach of catachrestic catechesis, Bevans' *synthetic model* of contextual theology seems appropriate as the theological approach for the integrative model of Christian religious education.⁷⁶¹ It is promising in its ability to look at truth from different theological perspectives, including postmodern (Tanner),⁷⁶² postcolonial (Sugirtharajah),⁷⁶³ postcolonial feminist (Kwok),⁷⁶⁴ and postcolonial liberation (Taylor).⁷⁶⁵ The following section will show how synthetic model of contextual theology can be deployed in catachrestic catechesis.

A. Bevans' Synthetic Model of Contextual Theology: A Dialogical Model

According to Bevans, the synthetic model of contextual theology is a middle of the-road model. It is synthetic in the Hegelian sense, in that it attempts to develop creative dialectic that is acceptable from all standpoints. But it is not Hegelian in that it seeks to sublimate differences into a new totality, for it also promotes dialogue between differences, particularly between cultures.

B. Connecting the Models: Synthetic-Integrative

The synthetic model of contextual theology recognizes contexts/cultures both for their

⁷⁶¹ Bevans, *Models*, 88-102.

⁷⁶² For postmodern theology, see Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

⁷⁶³ For postcolonial theology, see R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfiguration: An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2003). See also Katherine Keller et al., eds., *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire*, (St. Louis, Mo: Chalice Press, 2004).

⁷⁶⁴ For postcolonial feminist theology, see Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination: A Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster Knox Press, 2005).

⁷⁶⁵ For postcolonial liberation theology, see Mark Lewis Taylor, "Spirit of Liberation" in Katherine Keller et al., eds., *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2004), 39-57.

uniqueness and their complementarity. For example, according to Bevans, since an Indonesian has linguistic affinity with Malaysia, bears an Islamic religious worldview, and was colonized by Dutch culture, his or her identity goes beyond being merely Asian. He or she is, in a sense, Asian, Malaysian, Muslim, and Dutch, but is also uniquely Indonesian.⁷⁶⁶ A Bodo Christian, similarly, is an Indian (national identity), a tribal (constitutional/political identity), and a Christian (religious identity), with colonial legacy through Christianity, while still having unique traits that make him or her a Bodo.⁷⁶⁷ Hence, using the synthetic model of contextual theology, a Bodo theologian/pedagogue will approach Bodo culture with recognition of both its uniqueness and what it shares in common with other cultures. In catachrestic Christian religious education the synthetic model would support an emphasis on epistemological categories from a particular site while still considering others in conversation/dialogue with the local example(s).

The synthetic model of contextual theology is dialogical. On the one hand, it tries to balance the importance of the gospel message and the heritage of traditional formulations, and on the other, recognizes the vital role of context in doing theology. In this model a particular context is understood as unique while also in relation to others. This means equal importance is given to both gospel/faith/message and context/culture/community experience in a dialectical way through hospitality and dialogue. Biblical revelation is understood both as simultaneously “finished, once for all, of a particular place” and “ongoing, present, operating in all culture in uncircumscribable

⁷⁶⁶ Bevans, *Models*, 90.

⁷⁶⁷ Either due to imposition or transposition such multiple identities are a reality as a result of cultural hybridity in the postcolonial and postmodern world that is on the one hand predicament but on the other provides possibilities of variety and novelty. Orlando O. Espin in his work *Grace and Humanness* reflects similar notion where he talks about “mestizaje” theology. See also Isasi-Diaz, “Mujerista Discourse,” 44-67.

way.”⁷⁶⁸ In other words, biblical revelation has to be understood as having occurred in particular historical contexts and as something that continues to take place. Theology entails an ongoing conversation between context and text, and gospel/faith and communities/cultures.

The synthetic model is also appealing because it is open-ended and does not follow a strict direction, ensuring that catachrestic Christian religious education will be similarly unconstrained and therefore more inclined toward being contextual. Pedagogy based on the synthetic model resembles the pedagogy of cultural practices that was discussed in Chapter Two and is quite fitting to Bodo sensibilities. Further, as the synthetic model attempts to witness to the “true universality of Christian faith,” catachrestic Christian religious education based on this theology acknowledges that Christian faith can be taught and learnt within every cultural context and everyone can learn from everyone else within the purview of their own cultures. As such, we need not change our own culture or change somebody else’s culture to learn and teach Christian faith and practices.

Despite all these advantages, the synthetic model is not free from limitations. As Bevans points out, its ambiguity places it in danger of “selling out” to other cultures, traditions, and social locations, affirming all equally and without critical criteria. He therefore warns that theologians and educators must be careful so that they do not succumb to the power and subtle manipulation of dominant cultures.⁷⁶⁹ In being *laissez-faire*, this model’s attempt to build up a creative and healthy tension may lead it to merely juxtaposing ideas without creatively harnessing their interaction in transformative

⁷⁶⁸ Bevans, *Models*, 91.

⁷⁶⁹ Bevans, *Models*, 94.

ways.⁷⁷⁰ In this section we have seen how catachrestic catechesis can use synthetic model as its theological approach. Next, I turn to address the topic of learners and teachers.

VII. Learners and Teachers

In this section, I describe the ways in which catachrestic Christian religious education under the integrative model views learners and teachers. It is very important for the teacher to know the learners before undertaking any teaching activity in a given community, particularly in adult education. In a general sense we can view learners and educators as human beings with basic spiritual, emotional, psychological, and material needs. We can view them with basic human traits of goodness and individual worth.⁷⁷¹ However, I argue that we must go beyond such generic understandings.

In catachrestic catechesis, I suggest that learners have to be understood both as individuals and as a community, within their socio-historical and political contexts. We need to see them as a whole beings formed within a complex matrix of relationships and social structures. If we cannot see this then we cannot teach them effectively.⁷⁷²

Pedagogues must then have a fair knowledge of the context/culture of the learners—what Gadamer calls their “situation.”⁷⁷³ Pedagogues need not be experts in the fields of politics, economy, and sociology, but they must be well-acquainted with the socio-economic and political conditions of the learners they are working with and with how those learners locate themselves existentially in those conditions. This will lead to an

⁷⁷⁰ Bevans, *Models*, 95.

⁷⁷¹ Parker Palmer in his works, *To Know as We are Known: A Spirituality of Education* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983) and *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1998), describes how to view our learners and at the same time the self as a teacher in an excellent and stimulating ways.

⁷⁷² Palmer, *Courage*, 2-3.

⁷⁷³ Gadamer, *Truth*, 302.

understanding of the struggles, aspirations, and needs of individual learners and thus enable the teachers to present faith and the gospel in a contextually-relevant way.

However, at the same time we must ensure that situation or situatedness of the learners does not become a fixed factor that limits the possibility of vision, but is instead an opportunity for growth and development.

In particular, my argument is that teachers must understand that church is a live community. I find similar emphasis in Norma Cook Everist, when she describes the congregation as “a community of teachers and learners.” While there may be specifically trained religious educators in a congregation’s life, “all members are religious educators, and lifelong learners as well.” Teaching and learning are not confined to classrooms, but “take place in formal and informal settings by designated and undesignated teachers who relate to and embody the beliefs, values, and practices of the community.”⁷⁷⁴

A. Learners

Learners have been described in different ways in different models of Christian religious education; these descriptions are quite imaginative and at times quite poetic. In his faith community paradigm, Westerhoff describes Christians (learners and teachers) as a “pilgrim people, a people on a pilgrimage through seasons of profane time made holy by the eternal cycle of sacred time.”⁷⁷⁵ Our pilgrimage is continuous, as is our teaching and learning. Westerhoff and Eusden, in their work *The Spiritual Life: Learning East and West*, which is influenced by Shunryu Suzuki’s *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*, make a telling comment that learners are also always beginners on the journey of learning. They

⁷⁷⁴ Everist, *Church as Learning*, 21.

⁷⁷⁵ John H. Westerhoff, *Pilgrim People: Learning through the Church Year* (Minneapolis: The Seabury Press, 1984), see also Westerhoff, *Living the Faith*, 29.

point out, “[beginners] start a journey with full attention; they are ready for anything; they offer themselves to the journey as they are.... A beginner's mind also depends on innocence.”⁷⁷⁶ Furthermore, when we view learning from a beginner's perspective there is always a sense of newness and freshness, and we are ready to greet each instance of learning with enthusiasm and an open mind. This creates wonder and excitement, but also presents ambiguity, risk, and, at times, even danger. A beginner's mind is always open, ready, and receptive, so every moment and event becomes meaningful. As learning is a life long journey and a constant beginning, an overemphasis on graded lessons seems a bit ludicrous.

Resonances of the metaphor of journeying for pedagogy are many. David Ng influenced by the Taoist tradition, describes Asian North American congregations, particularly those of Japanese, Chinese, Koreans and Taiwanese immigrants, as the “people on the way,” referencing Jesus’ claim, “I am the way, and the truth and the life” (John 14:6). Ng describes congregations as sojourners and pioneers in their faith journey.⁷⁷⁷ This is evocative of the Indian guru-sishya relationship, where the guru (teacher) and the sishyas (learners) lived together, worked together, and learned together in an ashram (monastery). It connects with what Jesus said to his disciples: “Come and see,” (John 1:39, RSV) an invitation to his disciples “to be with him” and to learn from him in community. Such a metaphor may be applicable to all Indian people groups, including the Bodo. However, I argue that metaphors of learners must be situated and appropriated within the historical, cultural, socio-economic, and political contexts of a particular community.

⁷⁷⁶ Westerhoff and Eusden, *Spiritual Life*, 65-81.

⁷⁷⁷ David Ng, “Introduction” in David Ng, ed., *People on the Way*, xv-xxix.

The above metaphors are readily applicable for the Bodos. However, keeping in mind the Bodo context, I further describe the Bodo learners in two ways. First, among the Bodos, Christian community learners can best be described metaphorically as “people on the move.” Movements for either separate states within the Indian Union or independent nationhood are very common among the tribes of northeast India, and social unrest is widespread. In the catachrestic model of Christian religious education in the Bodo context, learners are people who are on the move, on a journey through seasons of struggle and resistance but with an expectation that one day they will arrive at their destination. But at the same time the task of catachrestic catechesis is to bring people together with others on a mutual journey of conversation and dialogue for dwelling together in solidarity.

Second, my argument is that it is not enough to view learners poetically or metaphorically. Our understanding of them must be grounded in their existential realities. Bodos are in the process of subject formation/constitution as a result of their historical consciousness and cultural retrieval. The Bodos/learners are in search of their own ethno-historical identity. So the learners must be viewed as subjects and not as mere objects.⁷⁷⁸ They are part of a movement for the formation and preservation of their own ethnic, linguistic and, cultural dwelling—a site of being together, shaping a collective identity—and in the process become subjects by naming⁷⁷⁹ and expressing themselves to move inside out. They are in the process of defining themselves and their own destinies.

This may sound like the reverse ethnocentrism that postcolonial critics always

⁷⁷⁸ See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum Publishing Corporation, 1970), 75-78.

⁷⁷⁹ Freire, *Pedagogy*, 75-78.

fear.⁷⁸⁰ However, the movement of subalterns is not for the domination and assimilation of others but for the development of their subject constitution and collective agency. They face real threats to their ethnic, linguistic and cultural heritages and identities. In a globalizing world, where identities are no longer seem to be important and boundaries have become irrelevant, an important moment of self-definition of their identities has begun for the tribes of northeast India.⁷⁸¹ The task of catachrestic catechesis is to join in the constructive project, nurturing community as an embodiment of not merely of identity, but identity-in-difference so that solidarity with differences within community and among other communities becomes possible. In this sub-section, I described how learners should be viewed in catachrestic catechesis. In the next sub-section, I discuss how we should view teachers/educators.

B. Educators/Teachers

Traditional Bodo society had three main community leaders: *deori* or *deoshi* (priest), *gambra* (village head) and *ojha* (medicine man, equivalent to shaman).⁷⁸² In contemporary Bodo Christian communities, I liken the pastor of the local church to the *deori* (priest). Generally, now pastor in Bodo is called *gumgiri*. Its meaning closely resembles to shepherd or shepherding. A Bodo community still has a *gambra* (village head) who acts as a liaison officer between the village and the local government. Although, there are still *ojhas* (medicine men) in Bodo societies but they are no longer in

⁷⁸⁰ Peter Childs and Patrick Williams, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory* (London, New York: Prentice Hall, 1997).

⁷⁸¹ For the various movements of the northeast Indian tribes for their identity and solidarity, see Amalendu Kishore Chakraborty, *The Quest for Identity: The Tribal Solidarity Movement in North-East India, 1947-69* (Kolkata: The Asiatic Society, 2004).

⁷⁸² Brahma, *Study of*, 144-172. See also Endle, *Kacharis*, 39-40.

leadership positions.

My proposal is that catachrestic catechesis among the Bodo churches should promote a dialectical integration of traditional, community-based learning and modern schooling. Teaching and learning in Bodo society never depended on particular and hierarchical community leaders, and there were no appointed teachers. Religious teaching wasn't considered mere cognitive learning; moral and ethical templates were learned in and through family and community life in activities like saori, through action and reflection. In accordance with Aidan Kavanah, I advocate congregation/community as *theologia prima* and academic theologians as *theologia secunda*.⁷⁸³ Then, I also advocate community as the *didaskolos prima* or ("primary teachers") and professional teachers as *didaskolos secunda* ("secondary teachers"). In the Catachrestic Christian religious education under the integrative model, the community or church is the primary source of education. This fits well with what the chapter thus far has laid out—that is, a decolonizing approach to pedagogy that is communally based. In this section, I described the views of both learners and teachers. The final section builds upon this, as I propose briefly a curriculum for catachrestic catechesis in an integrative model.

VIII. Curriculum of the Catachrestic Christian Religious Education.

My suggestion regarding curriculum for a catachrestic Christian religious education for the Bodo churches is rudimentary in nature at this stage, requiring further development beyond the dissertation. However, here I offer a snapshot of what it entails. In any given educational program there are always two kinds of curricula, the explicit or written

⁷⁸³ Aidan Kavanah, *On Liturgical Theology* (New York: Pueblo Publishing House, 1981), 74-75. Similar thoughts are found in Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 71-91.

curriculum and the implicit or hidden curriculum. My argument is that catachrestic Christian religious education under the integrative model would look into the possibilities of dialectical integration between the two, as well as between content and context, lessons and experience, and familiar/similar and unfamiliar/dissimilar, particularly in adult education. It thus aims to be holistic in its approach and grounded in the practices of community life. In the elements of the explicit or written curriculum, I include the gospel, God's story, Christian traditions, other denominational materials related to Christian life, worship, rites and rituals, dance, arts, drama, and cultural artefacts. Oral traditions handed down communally from generation to generation come under the purview of implicit curriculum.

I find in Westerhoff's observation helpful in regards to learning between East and West. He points out that the post-reformation Western culture/tradition is a book-oriented culture that is generally based on reading and writing. Furthermore, Westerhoff notes that Western people speak of the "eyes of faith" and hold that "seeing is believing."⁷⁸⁴ Whether in worship or Christian religious education the primacy of the written word is complete. In contrast, in an oral culture/tradition, which is generally considered Eastern oriented learning involves all the senses and the imagination. In an oral culture truth is poetic and life is perceived as an organic whole, integrated and interconnected. However, some eastern traditions are also heavily based on written tradition, particularly in aspects of Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism.⁷⁸⁵

⁷⁸⁴ Westerhoff, *Pilgrim*, 8.

⁷⁸⁵ It is claimed that Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* is the most translated work in other languages among the oriental classics, which made Taoism popular in the West. See Nam-Soon Song, "Searching for an Alternative Christian Education" (an unpublished essay and class notes, Knox College, Toronto, 2008), 1-9.

However, I argue that there has to be dialectical integration of both written and oral culture/tradition. This helps to avoid a binary opposition of written/oral and east/west. Further, the curriculum will aim to bring into fruition the dialectical tension between cultural-symbolic and socio-political elements of a community in teaching and learning. For subalterns, I would take into account once erased and disavowed cultural elements such as festivals, dance, rites and ritual as a part of dialectical integration, which entails both retrieval and transformation with an anticipation of emancipation and improvisation. The curriculum of catachrestic Christian religious education under the integrative model would thus address the concerns of minorities, including people on the LGBT spectrum, migrants, aboriginal peoples, and people of hybrid and/or multiple identities. In Indian context, I would prioritize the narratives of women, Dalits, and tribals in the curriculum.

Conclusion: Toward a Live Community Practices

In this chapter I put forward a live community metaphor/model for doing catachrestic Christian religious education with a goal of dialectical integration/whole. A live community is a tradition-bearing community but at the same time transforming and liberating. A live community, therefore, operates productively through contrasts between sameness and difference, compatibility and incommensurability, and cohesion and dispersion both internally and externally. Contrasts are not inimical to community, but threads woven into the fabric of community life, especially intercultural communities oriented toward global solidarity.

To consider Christian religious education as a theological praxis, we must now consider how dialectical or dialogical praxis can take place in a live community, and how dialectical integration/whole can take place under this model. In the sixth chapter, I will put forth a few practical proposals for communal practices under live community model, based on the themes of hospitality, dialogue, humility, and justice.

Chapter Six

Catachrestic Catechesis: Live Community Practices

The necessity for this double aspect of hospitality is not only the prohibition to reshape the “guest” in the image of “host,” but also to reserve the right to those who thought they were hosts to become, at time guests—in other words to become “an other.”⁷⁸⁶

Introduction

In the preceding chapter I proposed a theoretical model of catachrestic Christian religious education that aims to function in a dialectical integration between self and other, sameness and difference, content and context, gospel and faith, and tradition and contemporaneity. I also proposed that the model function in a dialectical integration between dominant/cosmopolitan and marginal/vernacular, and centre and periphery. To that end, I have applied some pedagogical dimensions of saori, such as its integrative nature, to show how it works as a community metaphor and is a source of experiential learning. In this chapter, I will discuss how this theoretical model can be put into practice: live community embodies the various pedagogical dimensions of saori in and through solidarity and reciprocity, dialogue, humility and justice and thrives in a dialectical integration precisely amidst contrasts and differences.

My basic argument in this chapter is that, in postcolonial and postmodern contexts, Christian religious education based on a single narrative cannot function as a

⁷⁸⁶ Werner Ustorf, “The Cultural Origins of Intercultural Theology” in *Mission Studies*, 25, (2008), 229-251. See also on online at www.brill.nl/mist.

liberative praxis. Therefore, a Christian religious education has to function in a dialectical tension between various elements that integrates in acts of hospitality and dialogue. An effective, relevant, transforming and emancipatory Christian religious education has to be an education characterized by hospitality, dialogue, humility and justice. This is how Christian religious education can transcend the (sometimes) constrictive practices of localized solidarity in saori into a broader global solidarity that is hybridic and dialogical.

Chapter Six consists of four sections. In the first section, I discuss how hospitality can move beyond the localized solidarity of saori toward a hybridic and global solidarity. In the second, the third and the fourth sections, I discuss how dialogue, humility and justice can foster dialectical integration in teaching and learning activities.

I. Catachrestic Catechesis: Pedagogy of Hybridic Solidarity and Reciprocity in Intercultural Hospitality

In Chapter Two we noted that solidarity and reciprocity connected to the concept and practice of saori among the Bodos have been largely confined to particular locations, ethnic and social groups. So it is a localized solidarity. Traditionally, solidarity and reciprocity among the Bodos emerged in and through the participation of familial and corporate saoris followed by reflection, deliberation, and conversation (saorai). This solidarity was based on kinship and basically confined within the boundaries of same ethnic groups. Although, some corporate saoris operated beyond the confines of a single ethnic and linguistic group and thus were able to provide experiences of solidarity

beyond these boundaries, they were mainly geared toward specific works and did not promote cross-boundary solidarity in a larger sense.

In postcolonial and postmodern contexts parochial and ethnically-bound solidarity must expand toward a larger and more open “hybridic solidarity” that respects cultural differences and works toward “global solidarity,”⁷⁸⁷ encouraging and supporting dwelling together amidst double, multiple, and hybrid identities and internally differentiated cultures. In such a complex context, a community’s teaching and learning activity can never be wholesome and enriching if it is drawn only from a single narrative. Christian religious education must learn to reflect hybridic solidarity with global sensitivity. In this section my argument is that the notion of hospitality can transcend localized solidarity of saori toward a hybridic solidarity that leads to a globalizing sense of solidarity.

In this section, I discuss the theme of hospitality in both metaphorical and material practical senses. The notion of hospitality has become popular in the humanities, missionary work, theology, and Christian religious education circles in the last decades, particularly in the West. Following Jean Vanier, Brett P. Webb calls for gestures of hospitality towards the needy, those who reside at the church’s and world’s border.⁷⁸⁸ Jane Vella suggests “hospitality” as one of the practices in her work for dialogical teaching.⁷⁸⁹ Margaret Atkin even proposes offering hospitality to undocumented

⁷⁸⁷ Thomas E. Reynolds, *The Broken Whole: Philosophical Steps Toward a Theology of Global Solidarity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 95-100.

⁷⁸⁸ Brett P. Webb-Mitchell talks about “hospitality” in “Welcoming Those on the Church’s and World’s Borders” as part of Churches’ services in *Christly Gestures: Learning To Be Members of the Body of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 240-241.

⁷⁸⁹ See Jane Vella, *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach: The Power of Dialogue in Educating Adults* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002).

immigrants by way of welcoming to the West.⁷⁹⁰ In the West, particularly in the U.S.A. and Canada, the notion of hospitality became popular in academic discussions of Third World immigrants from the mid-twentieth century and onward. Werner Ustorf, in his essay “The Cultural Origins of Intercultural Theology,” mentions that the Tenth Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), held in 2013, focussed on “immigration and hospitality” as its central agenda.⁷⁹¹ From a theological perspective, Reynolds, in his essay “Improvising Together: Christian Solidarity and Hospitality as Jazz Performance,” brings out beautifully how hospitality can open up “new horizons” of possibilities for “global solidarity.”⁷⁹²

My approach to hospitality is from the epistemological position of an “other,” the “stranger”—a subaltern perspective. Keeping in mind my emphasis on intercultural inculturation I would call it “intercultural hospitality” or “hybridic hospitality.” For in postcolonial, postmodern contexts, I consider that we are no longer in a position of being purely host or guest, but instead exist within some combination of the two. Hence, the word “hybridic” qualifies hospitality appropriately. The word *hospitality* itself, derived from *hospitalite*, comes from the Latin words *hostis* (“stranger,” “public enemy”) and *hospes* (“host,” “guest,” “foreigner”).⁷⁹³ Postcolonial subjects can now assume the position of host after being forced into the position of guest due to the othering effects of colonization.

⁷⁹⁰ See Margaret Atkin, “Who is my Neighbour? Justice and Hospitality in a World of Strangers,” in *CAFORD: Just One World*, London, January 2005, (Class Notes). Atkin talks about Hui, an illegal Chinese immigrant who died at Morecanthe Bay in 2004. She challenges Christians to show hospitality, “impersonal justice” and “tolerance,” even to the people like Hui.

⁷⁹¹ Ustorf, “Cultural Origins,” 229-251.

⁷⁹² Thomas E. Reynolds, “Improvising Together: Christian Solidarity as Jazz Performance” in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 43:2, Winter, 2008, 45-66.

⁷⁹³ Ustorf, “Cultural Origins,” 229-251. For more on this topic, see Michele Hersberger, *A Christian View of Hospitality: Expecting Surprises* (Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 1999), 19-20.

Before addressing the use of this concept in pedagogy, I want to discuss the material and practical understanding of hospitality among the Bodos to make the concept clearer. Bodos have a rich traditional conceptual understanding and material practice of hospitality. The late Rev. Deben Bhuyan, the first native executive secretary of the NBBCA in Assam once shared the following observation with me: “I cannot but appreciate Bodos for two things, their ‘hospitality’ and their treatment of ‘domestic helpers.’”⁷⁹⁴ In a material and practical sense the concept of hospitality in Bodo communities is always associated with guests (*alashi*). Similar to the term “community” in the Bodo language there is no exact equivalent word for the English term “host.” However, the concept and practice of hospitality is an integral part of their cultural life. Normally, in Bodo society each household/family is considered a “host” and the person/family that hosts guest(s) is referred as *alashi swngra manshi/nokhor*, literally means the person/family who hosts guest. In certain cases the entire village is considered a “host.”⁷⁹⁵ And in each case the notion of the guest is paramount. Therefore, there cannot be a host or hospitality without a guest.

There are two phrases to describe acts of hospitality in a Bodo community. If a host (*alashi swngra*) is treating someone as a guest, then it is called *alashi swngnai* or *alashi jaahwnai*, which literally means “inviting/welcoming a guest” or “inviting/

⁷⁹⁴ Rev. D. Bhuyan and I worked together in NBBCA for almost a decade. Bodos do not have an exact term for “domestic helpers.” Instead, the terms Dahana or Haluwa (male) and Ruwati (female) are used, which literally mean “the one who ploughs” and “the one who plants.” Dahanas and Ruwatis were considered a part of the family members and were allowed to dine at the family table.

⁷⁹⁵ There is no noun word for “host” in Bodo rather there are verbs or adjectives for family/person who hosts guest(s) as “*alashi swngra nokhor/mansi*.” Therefore, in the Bodo understanding of hospitality, the emphasis is on an action rather than on a person/family.

welcoming a guest to dine with host.” *Swngnai* simply means “inviting,” “welcoming,” “asking a question,” “inquiring of someone,” thus “beginning a conversation.” The activities here stress the side of the host. Guests might be invited, arrive by surprise, or even be unwelcome. The Bodo approach to hosting an unwelcome or surprise guest, particularly at noon-time (which is a main meal time) is expressed in the proverb “*sanfwni alashikhw udi bashihwi hornanga*,” which translates as “do not send back a guest at noon with an empty stomach.” This recalls the root meaning of the word “hospitality,” which relates to the surprise arrival of a guest who is accepted into a home and invited to dine with the family.⁷⁹⁶ The other phrase that describes hospitality is from the guest’s side, connoting someone who arrives at another person’s house with or without an invitation.⁷⁹⁷ This is called *alashi jaanai* or *alashi jahwinai*. Here both *jaanai* and *jahwinai* mean “eating” or “dining.” For the Bodos, hospitality is always related to eating and dinning and the focus is always on the guest.

For the Bodos, guests (*alashi*) are subdivided into three levels, related to the proximity of the guest to the host. The first level *khurma* includes people who are closest to the host—that is blood relatives and members of both agnatic and non-agnatic extended families.⁷⁹⁸ The second level of guests includes people unrelated but still familiar to the host—for example, those from the same community. The guest in this case is typically a noon-time guest (*sanfwni alashi*) who arrives uninvited suddenly and unexpectedly but for whom one is nonetheless obligated to show hospitality. The third level of guest, which involves those who are strangers, is the highest level. Guests from

⁷⁹⁶ Reynolds, “Improvising Together,” 56.

⁷⁹⁷ Visit to relatives or extended families occur without invitation or prior information.

⁷⁹⁸ *Khurma* refers to one’s own flesh and blood relations and marriage between *khurmas* was strictly forbidden among Bodos. “Can a *khurma* marry a *khurma*?” was a common question when such marriage occurred.

this level can be called cross-cultural, inter-cultural, or even trans-cultural guests.⁷⁹⁹ For example, Bodos had traditional ties with the people of Bhutan.⁸⁰⁰ Despite chequered histories, the Bhutanese were often guests of the Bodos.⁸⁰¹

I have witnessed each of these levels of hospitality personally in my youth. As an instance of intercultural hospitality, every year two Bhutanese families of five-to-ten members each would visit our home and stay with us for weeks, if not for months. They used to come and stay with us at least twice every winter. However, hosting them was not a difficult task for us as they were guests of the entire village. Although they stayed with us, different households invited them for lunch or dinner in turn. One family head's name was Jambe and the other's was Sejje. Interestingly, they were referred as *gonger khurma* or *simsa khurma*, signifying that they were our blood relatives.⁸⁰²

They visited us every winter but there was never any advance notice. When winter came we would wait to hear the sound of horses' bells that indicated that they were arriving. Upon entering our home they would give us popcorn, dried chilli, fried beans, dried vegetables, knives called phatang, and other artefacts made of bamboo. In reciprocity at the time of their departure we would give them paddy, rice, dried fish, betel nuts, and send them off with steamed rice. This exchange of gifts shows the degree to which mutuality is at the core of hospitality in Bodo culture. Even visits were supposed to

⁷⁹⁹ I am using these terms rather loosely without technical definitions.

⁸⁰⁰ Bhutan is a small Himalayan sovereign kingdom. Religiously, it is a Buddhist dominated country.

⁸⁰¹ Oral tradition has it that the Bhutanese raided the Bodos on a number of times. Even after Indian independence Bodos had to pay taxes to the Bhutanese king for river water.

⁸⁰² In Bodo Bhutanese are referred as Gonger or Simsa.

be reciprocal, but to my recollection only my cousin and uncle visited them.⁸⁰³ It seemed our role was more of a host than guest.

Certain aspects of the experience of hospitality stand out for me. As a young boy, I was struck by the Bhutanese manner of dress, particularly a hat that the men would constantly wear, the short hair of the women, and their food habits. We would offer our guests chicken curry, but they preferred dried fish soup, steamed rice, and vegetables. Later on I came to learn that, as followers of Lama Guru (i.e., Buddhists), they would not eat freshly killed chicken.⁸⁰⁴ For Bodos, long hair was a sign of beauty for a woman and to see Bhutanese women with a short hair at young age was like a cultural shock for me. So from these visits I was exposed to different religious, aesthetic, and cultural practices and sensibilities. Such exposure to contrasts and differences is what hospitality entails in material and practical senses for the Bodos. And this is where potential for hybridic solidarity becomes cultivated. Unfortunately, for our family, however, we lost ties with the Bhutanese families completely. They simply stopped coming without any trace whatsoever.

In line with this, Bodos need to shift into intercultural hospitality for pedagogical purposes in the position of both guest and host. Intercultural hospitality creates liminal spaces where host and guest encounter one another neither with hostility nor with mere tolerance. In this liminal zone the host and the guest come together for meaningful and fruitful fellowship, sharing, and conversation. By intercultural hospitality, I mean an invocation or invitation to let the cultural borders of communities be crossed and to

⁸⁰³ One of the hurdles in visiting them was a rugged, weeklong journey on foot through the mountains.

⁸⁰⁴ At that time I did not know about Buddhism. All we knew was that they were followers of Lama Guru (Dalai Lama).

permit strangers to come and cohabit and share in positions of host-guest and guest-host manner. It is from border-crossing experiences in intercultural transactions that one comes to know the other and his or her culture.⁸⁰⁵ It is in working together, sharing together, learning together, and even dining together through intercultural exchanges. The liminal experience of such sharing together unsettles binary oppositions between guest and host, and in fact subverts hierarchical notions of “hosts” as privileged ones. In intercultural hospitality, host and guest intermingle in ways that blur the power differential and pave the way for mutual transformation. In intercultural hospitality a third space is created in between a host and a guest, where each other share differences dialectically and become more than what they were before.

Intercultural hospitality thus opens up outward toward differences with anticipation of innovation and transformation that leads to genuine “ecumenical dialogue.”⁸⁰⁶ Such intercultural hospitality can open up localized solidarity in saori to hybridic solidarity. This in turn can promote a church or live community as a place where creative and redemptive tension exists between the integrative power of identity and the innovative power of difference.⁸⁰⁷ Unless the localized solidarity of saori is opened up toward hybridic/global solidarity through intercultural hospitality, it will remain potentially ethnocentric, exclusive, self-enclosed and self-sufficient. It will remain resistant to improvisation and stop a community from becoming a living and liberating community. If there is no room for improvisation in a tradition like saori then there is mere preservation without innovation and change, which leads to stasis and creates the

⁸⁰⁵ Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, 131-132.

⁸⁰⁶ Reynolds, “Improvising Together,” 64.

⁸⁰⁷ Reynolds, “Improvising Together,” 45- 46.

conditions for the denial of difference. Saori itself resists this as a practice hospitable in character. Catachrestic Christian religious education under the integrative model has to be driven by an intercultural hospitality that operates in the continuity of tradition, while open to innovative transformation in dialogue with differences.

In Catachrestic Christian religious education, intercultural hospitality does not entail lack of focus, but rather a willingness to be open to other viewpoints and ideas and a recognition that truth cannot be known from only one perspective.⁸⁰⁸ Any Christian religious education that is confined by the goal of self-preservation remains self-enclosed and self-satisfied, undercutting potential for growth. A self-protective Christian religious education ends up being self-destructive. Intercultural hospitality has the potentiality to welcome differences and contrasts and to address the accompanying surprises and risks.⁸⁰⁹ As saori has an element of invitation or summons (*saori lingnai*), so also does the Bodo understanding of hospitality have this element, (*alashi lingnai* or *alashi swngnai*). Accordingly, Christian pedagogy has to be a pedagogy of invitation and welcome, asking for conversation and dialogue between teachers and learners, among different cultures and communities and even among different faiths. Such pedagogy is fundamentally communitarian and relational. It was a common scene in saoris, particularly in house construction saoris, that after day's hard work, while the *saorians* (participants) were busy eating and drinking, a surprise visitor would arrive, who is perhaps known or unknown to the participants. In such a situation there might be some who would be unhappy about the perceived intrusion, but others would welcome the

⁸⁰⁸ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2007), 90-93.

⁸⁰⁹ Reynolds, "Improvising Together," 51.

newcomer and share their food and drinks. They would welcome this guest in fellowship, despite this person not having earned the feast. In hospitality there will be surprises.

Welcoming an unknown guest can be a risky and even a dangerous business. It is important to differentiate between this and genuine intrusion or invasion. There will be elements within any community who will oppose openness and change and view it as a threat to community harmony.⁸¹⁰ In the event of the visit of a surprise guest there might be an initial feeling of loss. But as the host and guest converse and share, this often gives way to feelings of warmth and openness.

Whether in saori or hospitality, Bodos' understanding of each was an exercise in reciprocity to the core. Bodos' host-guest and guest-host relationships with the Bhutanese were always reciprocal. As mentioned already, as a young boy I was particularly interested in their popcorn and fried beans, and they were interested in our rice, betel nuts, and dried fish. By receiving their gifts of food items we tasted something of their culture, and by giving our gifts of food items, they tasted ours. Handicrafts made of bamboo demonstrated different skills of our cultures. I was particularly overwhelmed at their skill in making baskets out of *bijli* bamboo,⁸¹¹ which they used to carry cooked rice. So it was not only an exchange of tastes, but also an exchange of skills and knowledge. In intercultural hospitality, through mutual giving and receiving, we gain access to different knowledges and skills, which widens the scope of our epistemological perspectives and opens us up to the other. It opens up the possibilities of entertaining various perspectives as avenues for finding meaning and value through collective cooperation.

⁸¹⁰ Reynolds, "Improvising Together," 51.

⁸¹¹ This particular basket is made of a particular kind of bamboo called "bijli woowa." In Assam there are different kinds of bamboos called, bhuluka, khati, mokhol and bijli etc.

As I discussed in Chapter Two, saori recognizes that an individual or a single household cannot shoulder all household responsibilities. Therefore, reciprocity and cooperation are necessary to accomplish necessary tasks and goals. Reciprocity acknowledges an individual's limitations and the value of others. Reciprocity in hospitality is a way of enhancing our knowledge and widening our horizons. There is what Gadamer calls a "fusion of horizons" through reciprocity in hospitality, which inaugurates genuine conversation/dialogue in a potential global solidarity of learning.⁸¹² As we ate the Bhutanese foods (foreign foods) they became our foods, and as they ate our foods they became their foods. As we ate their food we experienced a surplus of taste when compared to our regular and habitual food. In pedagogical situations through intercultural hospitality we find what Paul Ricoeur calls a "surplus of meaning" in another perspective.⁸¹³ Paradoxically, by receiving another perspective in intercultural hospitality, a surplus meaning that was once foreign/different to us eventually becomes our own and enhances and enlarges our repertoire of teaching and learning activities.⁸¹⁴ Intercultural hospitality integrates differences and brings out novel shapes of human solidarity among different cultures and peoples. This is what happened among the Bodos and the Bhutanese. Catachrestic Christian religious education under the integrative model is open to these surplus meanings that are drawn from the other but resist hegemonic and totalizing epistemologies.

⁸¹² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, second edition (New York and London: Continuum, 1992), 388.

⁸¹³ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Forth Worth, Tx: Texas Christian University Press 1976), 91.

⁸¹⁴ Ricoeur writes, "To make one's own" what was previously "foreign" remains the ultimate aim of all hermeneutics. See Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 126.

The intercultural hospitality between the Bodos and Bhutanese revolved around generosity of giving and receiving. Although there was typically a reciprocal exchange of gifts, sometime towards the end of the third or the fourth visit there were no such gifts from the Bhutanese. Even so, the Bodo families would still offer the Bhutanese gifts. In familial saoris, such as house construction, rice planting and harvesting the exchange of services was reciprocal, but for widows and orphans it was done out of generosity without anything expected in return. So, there was a practice of *preferential option* for the widows and orphans. Both saori and hospitality generated a spirit of generosity among the Bodos. Hospitality often involves a generosity of giving without expecting anything in return.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, there are rich images of hospitality. In the Old Testament, in Genesis 18:1-19, we find one of the best examples of hospitality as three strangers appear suddenly before Abraham and Sarah. Verse one says, “And the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre and he sat in the tent door at the heat of the day.”⁸¹⁵ The phrases “the Lord” and “heat of the day” are important here. The guests were treated as gods. In India, a guest is generally referred to as an *atithi deva*. In Sanskrit *atithi* means “guest” and *deva* means “god” or “divine.” Abraham is sitting “at the heat of the day,” perhaps at around noon, and three strangers appear. These three divine guests cannot be sent back with empty stomachs and so Abraham and Sarah hasten to provide them with hospitality. As a result of this hospitality, there came a promise of the blessing of a son, despite their old age. By giving they receive, by welcoming and

⁸¹⁵ The Bible, Authorized King James Version, Barbour Publishing, Inc., 2006.

blessing they are themselves welcomed and blessed. In hospitality blessings flow both ways between host and guest. Blessings in hospitality are always reciprocal.

In fact, hospitality is rooted in blessing. One offers hospitality because one has first been blessed, having received hospitality. God charges the Israelites not to harm and oppose strangers because they themselves were once strangers in the land of Egypt and were received by God (Exodus 2:21). Further, God commands them to treat strangers as equal to their own kith and kin (Leviticus 19:33-34) because only by loving others can we love ourselves (Leviticus 25:23). And more, by welcoming others we welcome the divine (Deuteronomy 10:17-19). It is within the context of welcoming others in hospitality as ourselves that the beauty of differences becomes manifest. Difference is God's own creation. Quoting Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Reynolds writes that "this is the Hebrew Bible's single greatest and most counter-intuitive contribution to ethics—God creates difference; therefore, it is in one-who-is-different that we meet God."⁸¹⁶ It is in others that we see the face of God and, in turn, how they see the face of God in us.

In the New Testament too we find rich and splendid images of hospitality in the form of banquets. Jesus always compares the kingdom or kinship of God with a banquet. In Luke 14:13 we see Jesus' radical approach through radical message when he challenges his followers to invite the "poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind" to the feast rather than mighty and noble ones. Jesus radically changes the notion of *basileia*, or the kingdom of God by focusing on the other, the marginalized and outsiders. Jesus' notion of hospitality transgresses and even subverts established norms and conventions. It

⁸¹⁶ Reynolds, "Improvising Together," 59; see also Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilization* (New York and London: Continuum, 2002), 59.

challenges the status quo of a stereotypical community. By inviting the other Jesus identifies himself with them and shows a new paradigm of kingdom or kinship of God, based in God's love rather than human power or prestige. This is where the notion of a preferential option for the poor derives its origin. In the Indian context this preferential option directs itself toward Dalits, tribals and women, who face oppression and impoverishment.

In any given society we can always argue for fairness and impartiality but preferential treatment for the poor goes further than this. Because of the deplorable conditions in which impoverished and oppressed people live, we need to be partial towards them. Isasi-Diaz argues that this neither "violates cognitive impartiality" nor is it "intellectually dishonest."⁸¹⁷ To make a society an inclusive one, a preferential option for the poor is not only justifiable; it is desirable. Indeed, the moral measure of a society lies in the treatment of its most vulnerable. Furthermore, Jesus shows us that this invitation of hospitality should be extended even to our enemies. Our neighbour includes even our enemies (Matthew 5:43-45). This revolutionary and radical message of Christianity needs to be carried out through the educational ministry of the church. And it is in the Bodo context, the preferential option to the poor and needy (particularly widows and orphans) is well exemplified in the concept and practice of saori, providing a contextual starting point for the gospel of God's radical welcome and preferential option.

A church, therefore, has to be a community of hospitality in a deeply material sense, and not merely metaphorically. A true church has to be a welcoming community in

⁸¹⁷ Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, "Mujerista Discourse: A Platform for Latinas' Subjugated Knowledge" in Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz and Eduardo Mendieta, eds., *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 44-67.

which the call to justice and the preferential option are taken up. Hospitality in this sense is the true mark of an ecclesia, a “called out” community. Inviting and welcoming the other—the stranger, the outcast, the poor—in hospitality turns out to be welcoming angels, in whom we see the face of God (Hebrew 13:1-2). In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus encapsulates it this way: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Matt 25:45). The weak, destitute, and differently abled people must be at the centre of God’s love and grace when it comes to sharing and caring. This is where solidarity and hospitality come to their fullest meaning. It is no accident then, given the hospitable ethos of saori, that the day’s work always ended with a feast that included both surprise guests and children. Children, who played the whole day while adults were busy at saori, were never left out when it came to enjoying the feast.

Solidarity with others, and potentially all humanity, may sound like a utopian idea; but a church is called out precisely for this reason. A church, as a community of teaching, service, advocacy, and worship, and as an agent of God’s kinship must always open its arms in hospitality to others. A church is a community that celebrates God’s love and grace, a community for others and not for itself. Bevans and Schroeder rightly point out that, “the church is *only* church as it realizes insofar as it focuses on God’s reign [kinship of God]. The church comes to be the *church* as it realizes and recognizes that it is called beyond itself.”⁸¹⁸ Through its teaching and learning activity, a church should open up individuals to others in intercultural hospitality for a potential global solidarity. This is how we will come to be known in our differences as people, as opposed to a

⁸¹⁸ Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 9.

hierarchical, dominating, and exclusive society that seeks to assimilate or exclude differences. In this section, I have explained the concept of hospitality in both metaphorical and material senses and how it can transcend the localized solidarity of saori to hybridized solidarity for teaching and learning. Next, I discuss dialogue and its importance in catachrestic catechesis.

II. Catachrestic Catechesis: A Dialogical Pedagogy

In Chapter Two, I pointed out that saori (action) and saorai (deliberation, discussion, reflection) were juxtaposed and mutually inclusive. I also pointed out that saorai also entails conversation/dialogue. Saorai also can be interpreted as conversation. In this section, I discuss how the notion of conversation/dialogue (saorai) can further catachrestic catechesis toward a pedagogy of mutual engagement and interchange.

Dialogue is a basic foundation of teaching and learning. Due to pluralism, the importance and necessity of intercultural dialogue in teaching and learning for communal harmony, peace, and global solidarity has increased dramatically. However, because of its overuse, dialogue has often become a cliché in educational, theological, and missiological writing and theory. In the pedagogical arena it was Freire who revolutionized the concept in his work “Pedagogy of the Oppressed.” He approaches dialogue from the perspective of subalterns. Freire argues that the essence of dialogue is the “word”⁸¹⁹ or in other words the “voice.” Genuine dialogue can take place only when the other has the basic right to a

⁸¹⁹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 2010 edition with Introduction by Donald Macedo (New York: The Continuum Publishing Group, 1970), 87.

voice, which Freire calls “primordial right,” that they can use to name their world.⁸²⁰ In Christian pedagogy, this voice is achieved through semantics and semiotics, rites and rituals and worldviews and ethos. The right to voice is cultivated through careful practices of intercultural hospitality focussed on the Gospel witness to divine love and justice. Such witness involves honouring one’s own cultural heritage by which people come to voice and at the same time opening up for difference and contrast in others. This is the foundation of genuine dialogue. For example, in the case of the Bodos, the retrieval of formerly erased and disavowed cultural elements, which allow for the naming of identifying communal narratives and epistemological categories, is a necessary foundation for initiating dialogue. Learning a language is a window onto other languages, to new and wider horizons. This makes cultural retrieval a beginning, not an end, especially in light of intercultural hospitality.

Saori always involves saorai, a conversation/dialogue among the participants (saorians). Hospitality in reciprocity among the Bodos also always involves conversation. As the host and guests eat together, they converse centering around each other’s identity and well being, but also allowing spontaneous shifts to different topics. By dialogue, I mean an intentional and deliberate encounter and interchange within a community and among communities of different cultures in an intense conversation characterized by a spirit of freedom and reciprocity that respects and accepts differences and contrasts with an aim of understanding the other and broadening knowledge and learning. It is an existential and necessary reality. Open conversation in dialogue is possible only when we accept and respect the alterity of the other, the differences in culture, ideologies,

⁸²⁰ Freire, *Pedagogy*, 88.

concepts, and practices. Following Levinas, Young says that true “dialogism allows radical separation” of the other.⁸²¹ The goal of dialogue is not to win, or to vanquish the other, or to score points with the other, or to gain a feeling of intellectual, ideological, or spiritual superiority. The goal is to understand, appreciate, and learn about and through differences. Respecting the other here then involves a distance or “separation” based upon differences. And the interchange between parties require an anticipation of improvisation, variety and novelty. Dialogues need not necessarily lead to an agreement or consensus among those engaged, but in the to-and-fro of conversation a transpositioning and refashioning of knowledge can take place. Yet, as Gadamer says, in dialogue, “something is placed in the centre,”⁸²² a shared focus among the dialoguers. In other words in the process of dialogue something takes place among partners. That “something” may not be definable, but it can bring transformation because of communion.⁸²³ Encountering the other in dialogue is a kind of “conversion” wherein each party becomes attuned to the other and as a result becomes something more because of it. Not only individually but together, in and through the “conversing” of differences.

Thus, dialogue affirms and upholds differences among communities and cultures. It entails moving out from our comfort zone and helps us to move away from bigoted xenophobia. As children, xenophobia was a common response when we first encountered the Bhutanese. But as we interacted with them and participated in conversation/dialogue, this fear disappeared and we realized that they were our guests—*khurma* of our own flesh and blood. Conversation/dialogue not only helps us to move away from bigoted

⁸²¹ Robert C. Young, *White Mythologies: Writing history and the West* (London, New York: Routledge, 1990), 14.

⁸²² Gadamer, *Truth*, 379.

⁸²³ Gadamer, *Truth*, 379.

xenophobia but it brings together the parties involved as they “bring out themselves”⁸²⁴ in mutual understanding and appreciation, which is mutually beneficial.

Dialogue is not only confined to the inter-subjective and special intercultural spheres. Communities have to be in constant dialogue within themselves. In fact, communities are rooted in networks of dialogue occurring internally as well as with other communities/culture. Thus dialogue extends from a micro to a macro level. A community also is in a constant dialogue with its past traditions as well as those of the present. If the past is not brought into the present through a kind of conversation, then the traditions that comprise a community will reach their end.⁸²⁵ Ongoing dialogue between past and present is done through interpretation and re-interpretation by varied constituencies and it focuses a community’s shared meanings and values. This is not only healthy for the community but also for harmonious coexistence with other communities in hybridic/global solidarity. It fosters growth within the community and “creates forward momentum that contributes to health and longevity.”⁸²⁶

Dialogue has ethical dimensions for both individuals and communities in conversation. It nurtures critical self-awareness and reflexivity, as the difference of others becomes a mirror through which we come to know ourselves. Thus, dialogue in Christian religious education helps communities to examine their semantics and semiotics, rites and rituals, and ethos and worldviews in relation to rival interpretations and meanings. In turn, it helps to broaden horizons and to bring about variety and novelty. Dialogue in Christian religious education also encourages the interrogation of a community’s

⁸²⁴ Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, 78.

⁸²⁵ Gadamer, *Truth*, 379-385.

⁸²⁶ Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, 54.

assumed structure of semantic power and the mechanisms that give priority to dominant interpretations over others. It reminds us that every meaning and interpretation is subject to critique, examination, and even open challenge. Self-reflexivity and self-evaluation are necessities for the health of education. This can be done through periodical curriculum revision and assessment of the overall educational ministry of the church. For dialogue involves “an acknowledgement of [the] fallibility and limitations”⁸²⁷ of our meanings. Particularly in a field like Christian religious education that tries to define meanings and symbols relating to Christian faith and conduct, this acknowledgement is necessary for the simple reason that the gospel has abundant meanings for every tribe and nation. No meaning in Christian religious education can be assumed to be completely fixed. Meanings must be subject to constant scrutiny in different times and places and open to needed modification and development. Indeed, dialogue provides avenues for differences to interrupt established sets of meanings and values. Contrast will naturally surface in dialogical situations, but in Christian religious education such contrast can support live community and eschew fomenting isolation or separation.

What are the foundations of dialogue in a field like Christian religious education? Freire claims that in pedagogy, love, humility, and faith are the basic foundations on which dialogue must be built.⁸²⁸ This view is in keeping with the New Testament. Following Gabriel Marcel, Reynolds advocates that dialogue must be based on the “singular worth” of the other and respect the difference represented in that worth. In this way dialogue can produce a “creative fidelity” among the dialoguers, a faithfulness to

⁸²⁷ Reynolds, “Improvising Together,” 54.

⁸²⁸ Freire, *Pedagogy*, 89-92.

each other that is based in the creative openness and humility of hospitality.⁸²⁹ Fidelity has overt religious connotations and connects with hospitality through a basic sense of trust in the other. Therefore, for genuine dialogue in catachrestic catechesis, I argue for a basic and simple trust in others as its first foundation. In pedagogical practices, developing trust would entail mutual listening, reciprocal attention giving and understanding among the educators/teachers and learners/students in the discourses, particularly amidst contrasts and differences. Mutual trust is the cornerstone of dialogue for pedagogy. It is immediate and primordial and is also the basis of all relationships in our lives. Trust in the other suggests an ability to both rely on and be relied upon by that other.

By trust, I also mean putting confidence in others. Trust generates confidence in others to bring out positive and good through dialogue amidst differences and contrasts. Confidence is a key part of trust that complements humility. When “communal riots” occur,⁸³⁰ such as the July, 2012 clash between Bodos and illegal Bangladeshi immigrants in Assam, the response is often the formation of peace committees to promote confidence building measures. Confidence in one another is a requirement for dialogue. And in the classroom situation confidence in the learners on the part of teachers is a must. It will help the learner find strength to risk realizing his or her potential. This is what education means. Education derived from the Latin *edu* and *cere* means “an act of leading out.” It is a means to help learners to bring out their abilities and potentialities and this is done

⁸²⁹ Reynolds, *Broken Whole*, 116-121. See also Gabriel Marchel, *Creative Fidelity*, translated from French and with an Introduction by Robert Richard (New York: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1964), 162.

⁸³⁰ This is the common term often used for an ethnic clashes in Assam. In this particular clash over one hundred people were killed and more than five hundred thousand people were rendered homeless, thousands of houses were burnt, so the term is justifiable to convey the magnitude and scale of the casualties.

through shared praxis and dialogue⁸³¹ in which confidence is cultivated. Further, by trust I also mean the ability and tenacity of taking care and shouldering responsibility for the other, particularly when it comes to differently abled people who require supportive accommodations to participate fully in a community of learning. Trust in all forms is a beacon of hope for the future.

It is generally understood that faith, fidelity, and trust are based on individual worth. While it is generally assumed that concern for singular worth would naturally lead to concern for collective worth, this is often not the case. Therefore, my argument is that this view should be expanded to focus on collective worth, the worth of a particular community or an ethnic group or any group of individuals who are different from the dominant group. It is certainly easier to talk about according worth to individuals. In the Indian context, where communal riots or ethnic clashes have become more frequent, according collective worth can be a pivotal step towards the conversation/dialogue that leads to solidarity. When the collective worth of communities is diminished then bigoted xenophobia and ethnic cleansing loom large.⁸³² In the epistemological arena, it means giving due value to the subjugated knowledge of the subalterns.

The second foundation for dialogue in catachrestic catechesis is courage. Dialogue/conversation in teaching and learning requires courage in order to overcome the inherent risks and challenges. Parker J. Palmer explains that the courage to teach in

⁸³¹ Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1999). Groome points out that dialogue/conversation have to take place through shared praxis.

⁸³² During the Bodoland movement the Assamese burnt over one hundred Bodo houses at Udalguri, the place where I come from. Bodos and Assamese lived side by side for centuries. Despite cross-cultural friendships the failure to give due recognition to each other's ethnic identities and differences led to violence.

dialogue/conversation is “the courage to keep one’s heart open in moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able to so that teachers and students and subjects can be woven into the fabric of community that learning, and living, require.”⁸³³ The opposite of courage is fear. Fear holds us back. Fear blocks communication. Fear distances teachers and students from each other and obscures the objects of teaching. Lack of hospitality and disconnectedness produce a “culture of fear.”⁸³⁴ When there is a culture of fear prevailing due to domination of any sort, then conversation/dialogue cannot take place. And culture of fear leads to “a culture of silence.”⁸³⁵ Conversation/dialogue conducted with hospitable openness generates courage and in turn, courage fosters dialogue. Courage in dialogical teaching also involves humbly accepting and acknowledging one’s own cultural and historical (personal and collective) identity. Courage in dialogical teaching flows from the integrity of a person.⁸³⁶

Finally, dialogue is based on hope and that hope helps us to move forward together in solidarity. Hospitality expects surprises and remains open to the stranger who may come unannounced. Dialogue remains open to the future. Although we cannot predict or prejudge what would “come out” (or out come) of our conversation/dialogue, we can hope that “something” productive will “emerge.”⁸³⁷ That something may not yet be definable at all, let alone measurable, but its possibility gives hope for future. And

⁸³³ Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage To Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life*, 10th edition (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1998), 11-12.

⁸³⁴ Palmer, *Courage to teach*, 35-61.

⁸³⁵ See Paulo Freire, *Education For Critical Consciousness* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973). While Palmer talks about fear in terms of personal fear as teachers, Freire talks about fear due to cultural and political domination by the oppressors on the oppressed.

⁸³⁶ Palmer, *Courage To Teach*, 13-14.

⁸³⁷ Gadamer, *Truth*, 383.

hope requires humility, leading to another basic theme of catachrestic catechesis in an integrative model.

III. Catachrestic Catechesis: A Pedagogy of Humility and Pedagogy in Humility

In the discussion of saori in Chapter Two, we saw that saori entails humility. The exchange of service and reciprocity among families in saori demonstrate the notion of humility. It demonstrates the limitations of person's own ability, knowledge and understanding and highlights our need for one another, our interdependence. Catachrestic catechesis in the integrative model is both a pedagogy of humility and a pedagogy in humility. As one of the agendas of catachrestic catechesis entails retrieving erased and disavowed cultural elements of subalterns to use as a basis for pedagogy, there is a danger that this will lead to self-sufficiency and self-enclosure. There is also a danger associated with seeking a "pure" basis for pedagogy in the name of indigenization or contextualization. The feelings of comfort that come from familiar and established meanings and values may lead to self-deception and self-destruction.

In the spirit of reflexivity and reciprocity, humility can curb these tendencies. In the context of Christian pedagogy by humility, I mean an acknowledgement of the limitations of one's own perspective in the areas of semantics and semiotics, and rites and rituals, both in lived-experience and Christian practices. It is a willingness to listen and learn from other voices, thus leading to consider alternative approaches in doing Christian religious education. Humility is neither a form of self-pitying politeness nor an aspiration to some self-deprecating standard of propriety, but a conscious effort to move

one's own teaching and learning activity from the familiar to the unfamiliar, the conventional to the innovative, and the repetitive to the vital. Neither is it docility or deference, or the surrendering of one's own subject position and narrative authority. However, it means acknowledging the limitations of one own frame of reference, refraining from being self-enclosed and arrogant about one's own narrative and traditions. Honesty, transparency, and truthfulness (with oneself and others) are the trademarks of humility.

By humility, I also mean self-emptying (Philippians 2:1-10). We find the supreme example of humility in Jesus, expressed in Paul's letter to the Philippians, where he describes how Jesus emptied himself, became flesh, and suffered a humiliating death on the cross. This does not mean docility or acquiescing to abuse or exploitation. It is rather refraining from self-glory and self-exaltation. For pedagogical purposes, Taoism offers a very rich understanding of emptiness:

The Way [Tao] is empty, yet never refills with use. Bottomless it is, like the forefather of the myriad creatures. The space between heaven and earth, how like a bellows it is. Empty but never exhausted. The more it pumps, the more comes out.⁸³⁸

Emptiness in this way signifies a perpetual readiness to accept new things. In Taoism, this emptiness is compared with an open space between heaven and earth, like a bellows that never gets exhausted. The more it is pumped, the more comes out. Put differently, learning is like eating. The food that we eat is transformed into energy and waste, the latter of which is expelled to empty our stomachs, which we need to refill our stomach

⁸³⁸ See Victor H. Mair, *Tao Te Ching* (New York: Batman Books, 1990), 62-63.

again and again. It is an ongoing process of openness.

Taoism also offers wisdom of self-emptying by way of decreasing our knowledge, where it says: “Hearing the Way leads to daily decrease, decrease and again decrease, until you reach nonaction. Though nonaction, no action is left undone.”⁸³⁹ While it is generally understood that the purpose of education is to increase knowledge daily as a way toward influence and power, pursuing the Way [Tao] leads to an alternative way of being decreased in knowledge. That is, the more we learn, the more we come to know our limitations and finitude, causing us to pause in awe in the face of the universe. This kind of nonaction may sound actionless, but such is not the case. The feeling of decrease brought on by self-emptying is positive and productive, because its openness leads to new horizons of learning. Unless there is an understood absence there is no room for increase. It is paradoxical in nature.

Following Thomas Merton, by humility or self-emptying I also mean “nothingness,”⁸⁴⁰ which also can be referred as an “absolute poverty.”⁸⁴¹ This realization of nothingness is where God’s action takes place in human beings. Self-emptying or nothingness is thus essential for acquiring both knowledge and the experience of God. The space of “nothingness” or “absolute poverty” is “the virgin point” of a human being, a point that is “nondescript” and “evanescent.”⁸⁴² When we come to the point of nothingness there is eagerness, enthusiasm, and a sense of new beginnings. It is a space of wonderment that invites further learning and dialogue.

⁸³⁹ Mair, *Tao*, 16.

⁸⁴⁰ Christine M. Bochen, *Thomas Merton: Essential Writings* (New York: Orbis Books, 2000), 61.

⁸⁴¹ Bochen, *Thomas Merton*, 61.

⁸⁴² Thomas Merton, *The New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Direction Publishing Corporation, 1962) 37-39. See also Bouchen, *Thomas Merton*, 60-61.

Finally, based on such notions of humility, I advocate for “epistemological humility” as opposed to “epistemological arrogance” in catachrestic catechesis.⁸⁴³ If the counter-knowledges of the subalterns do not foster epistemological humility, they will develop the same epistemological arrogance as colonial epistemology. This will in turn lead to a “self-defeating” rather than “liberating epistemology.”⁸⁴⁴ It will be captivated by self-enclosed dynamic of protectionism. Epistemological humility is a constant self-examination, guarding against dangerous ideals of “loaded and corrupt universalism”⁸⁴⁵ and imperialistic designs of uniformity and homogenization. Without humility, epistemological arrogance will lead us to what postcolonial critics have called “sanctioned ignorance.”⁸⁴⁶ For religious education there is always a threat of sanctioned ignorance from the religion’s various creeds and doctrines. Self-sufficiency and self-enclosure in epistemology, theology and philosophy will end up fostering ignorance of other traditions, and thus cut off from opportunities for vitality and novelty. Humility is essential for catachrestic catechesis in an integrative model. But humility also entails justice, another aspect of catachrestic catechesis.

IV. Catachrestic Catechesis: A Pedagogy of and for Justice in Live Communities

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the sharing of work in saori among the Bodos exemplifies a sense of justice and fairness. Both exchange of service and equitable share of work in

⁸⁴³ Otto Maduro, “An(other) Invitation to Epistemological Humility: Notes toward a Self-Critical Approach to Counter-Knowledges” in Isasi- Díaz and Mendieta, eds., *Decolonizing Epistemologies*, 87-103.

⁸⁴⁴ Maduro, “An(other) Invitation,” 87.

⁸⁴⁵ Reynolds talks about “loaded and corrupt universalism” in *The Broken Whole*. See, particularly Chapter Two.

⁸⁴⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique on Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 2-10.

saori among the participants and families underscore the sense of justice and fairness. Catachrestic Christian religious education is an education of and for justice. Here, I differentiate justice in two broad categories. First, justice in a broad general sense and second, in a relative sense, where its operation has to be situated within a particular context. For catachrestic catechesis, I emphasize the second category. In a general sense, the overall concern should be to see that justice is executed on the principles of universal human rights—that is, seeking to promote dignity, equality, and equal opportunity to all human beings irrespective of creed, class, caste, or gender. Justice understood in a general and universal sense tends to adopt an assimilationist view.⁸⁴⁷ However, we have to engage justice in particular contexts because socio-economic and political structures are not all equal and any steps towards justice must recognize these social inequalities.

Justice understood in specific socio-economic and political contexts is geared towards the elimination of institutionalized domination and oppression. It rejects the “philosophical theories of justice that tend to restrict the meaning of social justice to morally proper distribution of benefits and burden among society’s members,” particularly, those dealing with the allocation of materials goods such as resources, income, and wealth or the distribution of jobs.⁸⁴⁸

Further, according to Isasi-Diaz, justice understood in the sense of “fairness and impartiality” cannot adequately address the socio-economic and political issues of the

⁸⁴⁷ See Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990). 163. Richard Wasserstrom argues for an assimilationist view rather than an acknowledgement of social group identities in his essay “On Racism and Sexism” in *Philosophy and Social Issues* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980).

⁸⁴⁸ For different definitions of justice, see Young, *Justice and*, in Chapter One. Justice as a practice in Christian Education, see Jane Vella, *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach: The Power of Dialogue in Educating Adults* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002).

oppressed and impoverished social groups. Therefore, she argues not for an option of impartiality but rather for a “partiality of option” for such social groups.⁸⁴⁹ Justice understood in terms of equality, fairness, and impartiality is based on an illusory assumption that societies are built on intentionally *just* socio-economic structures, which is not always the case. Justice is one of the key themes in the liberation paradigm, whether in theology, hermeneutics, or pedagogy, even taking precedence over peace. There cannot be peace without justice. By justice in catachrestic Christian religious education, I mean giving voice to the voiceless and listening to the alternative voices of different groups. And I also mean providing equal opportunities to explore and reanimate the subjugated knowledges (particularly religious knowledges) and experiences of the marginalized and the excluded, and to understand it in the context of the tragic histories of these groups.

Beyond these considerations of hospitality, dialogue, humility, and justice, I would add that catachrestic catechesis be carried out with love and compassion, not in the sense of mere sentimentality, but with deep commitment and purpose. Hybridic solidarity must entail love and compassion for all—both self and other, and both dominant and marginal. This is where we can see the expression and execution of justice and peace.

⁸⁴⁹ For more details on “partiality of option” see Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, “Mujerista Discourse,” in Isasi-Diaz and Mendieta, eds., *Decolonizing Epistemologies*, 44-67. The Pro-active Actions towards the First Nation people in North America and reservation and quota system for the Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Class (OBC) in India, which is called “Positive Discrimination” in India, are some of the examples of such provisions. However such provisions are not enough because there are uncategorized groups who are deprived of “partiality of option.”

Conclusion: Promises and Perils

In Chapter Five and Six, I have proposed a catachrestic Christian religious education theory as an integrative model within a postcolonial perspective and a subaltern approach. While, in Chapter Five, I proposed a theoretical model of catachrestic catechesis, in Chapter Six I explored how community practices of this model in teaching and learning can take place through the themes of hospitality, dialogue, humility and justice for dwelling together in global or hybridic solidarity. However, no matter how might we develop a model for education, it is not free from limitations. While this model offers promising possibilities, we must also be aware of some of its risks.

Therefore, as a part of humility, it is instructive to acknowledge overtly some risks of this model. First, it entails a degree of ambiguity, discussed in Chapter Three, which renders the model contingent, unstable and in constant flux and fluid. Because of this, one has to be patient, perseverant, and even cautious at times. As Tanner rightly points out, “belief and value commitments [even in Christian religious education] are usually left underdeveloped and ‘ambiguous’ in the ordinary practice of faith, and the pattern of a dogmatic system will occlude the contradictory way commitments occur.”⁸⁵⁰ Ambiguity is common in postmodern and postcolonial situations. This ambiguity occurs due to what I call the practical or pragmatic contingencies of the lived experiences of a community. Unlike systematic theology or philosophy, catachrestic/liberation models suffer from a lack of concrete systematization and well-built theoretical coherence due to

⁸⁵⁰ Kathryn Tanner, “Theological Reflection and Christian Practices” in Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, eds., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapid, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 230.

their contextual nature, consisting of complex configurations of the lived experiences of live communities.

As mentioned in Chapter Five, in such a model there is also a danger of falling into the trap of subtly manipulating dominant cultures, traditions, or discourses without meaningful dialogue or encounters and without acknowledging creative dialectical tensions, or possibly merely juxtaposing different views without pushing further toward integration. There is therefore continual need to keep alert to how tensions emerge and recognize temptation to oppositional thinking, which may seem easier to adopt in order to gain leverage against oppressive forces, but which in the end can mask deeper mechanism of oppression and also pre-empt liberative praxis. Postcolonial reservations against binary thinking, which we have discussed, mitigate such problems.

Finally, we must always guard against the free play of polarities and pluralities, a wishy-washy mode of thinking with an “anything goes” attitude. It is easy to be tempted to relativism amidst the dizzying play of differences in our postcolonial/postmodern contexts. But postcolonial histories require a concern for justice that does not allow room for the luxury of remaining uncommitted from a position of detached privilege. Subaltern perspectives call for a liberationist preferential option, which open toward creating live community in a praxis of solidarity.

Despite its limitations, however, it is my hope that this model can provide an angle of vision for doing Christian religious education among the subaltern groups with a perspective beyond postcoloniality.

Conclusion

Summary Review and Practical Implications

In this dissertation, my goal has been to provide an alternative Christian religious education theory in a subaltern approach with a postcolonial perspective. To this end, upon critically analyzing major contemporary Christian education theories, I proposed a catachrestic Christian religious education theory based on an integrative model, rooted in the pedagogical dimensions of Bodo saori. I argued from a postcolonial standpoint how pedagogical dimensions/categories of saori can be potential sources for developing an alternative model of Christian religious education for subalterns.

In this conclusion, I offer a summary review of the main points of the dissertation, an exploration of the implications of what has been argued both in the present and in the future, and a final concluding statement.

I. Summary Review

In order to achieve my stated goal, in the Introduction, I highlighted the key challenges in Christian religious education faced by Indian churches, particularly the Bodo churches. I also defined several important categories and terms in order to clarify some of the fundamental aims of my study.

In Chapter One I discussed the past history and present experiences of the Bodos from the perspectives of subaltern historiography, complemented by Iggers' postmodern

understanding of history, in the contexts of Sanskritization, colonialism, neocolonialism and Hindutva. This developed the contextual background of my dissertation. I argued that the past history and present experiences of the Bodos are best accounted for through the development of a kaleidoscopic Christian religious education sensitive to the Bodo context. I analyzed how an historical consciousness, as a part of the new historicism, led the Bodos to the cognizance of their historical difference against homogenizing and dominating aryanized Assamese community. I argued then that this cognizance of historical difference raises the question of the role of history/narrative in epistemology—that is, for knowledge production and pedagogy, particularly in Christian religious education. Therefore, following Bhabha, I outlined the significance and the role of such history/narrative for epistemology.

In Chapter Two, I discussed how historical consciousness has led subalterns to retrieve their once erased and disavowed cultural elements during civilizing and missionizing eras and also to rediscover epistemological categories from them. Now, therefore, there is a shift from a “pedagogy of culture” to “culture of pedagogy” or “pedagogy of cultural practices.” To help illustrate this, I analyzed Bodo saori from a Geertzian concept of culture and argued for such a shift in pedagogy. I derived pedagogical dimensions/categories from saori, the entelechy of Bodo pedagogy and the epicentre of Bodos’ cultural and socio-economic life, then highlighting its integrative nature, community focus, ethos of solidarity and reciprocity, sense of justice, preferential option, experiential learning, conversation and dialogue, humility and justice, all of which can be potential openings from local horizons toward global applications. However, I also explored how critics such as Grossberg and others argue that such

endeavour is radically contextual and therefore cannot be a critical tool for liberative praxis.

To address such critique, in Chapter Three, I worked to develop a theoretical framework based on postcolonial theories, hermeneutics and postcolonial understandings of culture, employing the works of various postcolonial authors like Said, Spivak and Bhabha. Drawing from Bhabha's notion of hybridic culture and Tanner's postmodern understanding of culture in conjunction with Reynolds' dialectical pluralism, I argued for dialectical integration of tensions within Christian religious education today. I also proposed an intercultural biblical hermeneutics that might enable Christian religious education in Indian churches to be sensitive to local cultural signs and symbols in the task of interpretation of biblical texts. Then, to advance the discussion forward, I analyzed the modernist/structuralist and postcolonial/postmodern concepts of culture and argued for the dialectical reconstruction of these two concepts of culture.

Building from this, I sought in Chapter Four to show how the traditional Christian religious education approach in the Bodo churches is still complicit with colonial legacy inherited from missionary teachings and functions as a pastoral regime. The discussion focused upon critically analyzing contemporary Christian religious education approaches or models in their historical, ideological, cultural and theological elements and finding corresponding links with Bevans' models of contextual theologies, arguing that these cannot adequately address the postcolonial predicaments and the dialectical tensions prevalent in Christian religious education domain in the Bodo context.

Chapter Five proposed an alternative model of Christian religious education. A catachrestic Christian religious education as an integrative model is better equipped to meet postcolonial challenges, rooted in pedagogical dimensions of saori and bringing in a dialectical integration of various tensions—between past (tradition) and present (contemporaneity), self and other, dominant/cosmopolitan and marginal/vernacular, centre and periphery, content and context, gospel/faith and culture, and local/particular and global/universal. To elaborate this model, I suggested employing a reconstructed metaphor of “live community,” methods of intercultural inculturation, experiential learning and narrativization, linking these with Bevans’ synthetic model of contextual theology. Then, I also argued not only for a better understanding of education in its historical, cultural and socio-political contexts, but further for developing an inclusive curriculum for the Bodo churches that seeks dialectically and conversationally to integrate various tensions.

Finally, as a way of proposing some provisional ways or making such an integrative curriculum possible, in Chapter Six, I suggested employing themes of hospitality, dialogue, humility and justice as elements fostering the dialectical integration of tensions between self and other, familiar/sameness and unfamiliar/different, West and East and dominant/cosmopolitan and periphery/vernacular. While Chapter Five provided a theoretical model, Chapter Six proposes how to put these themes into practices in the teaching and learning activity of a community. As I offered an alternative model of Christian religious education, I also pointed out some risks of the model and encouraged practioners to be patient, perseverant and even to be cautious at times. In what follows, I will briefly discuss the implications of this model for the Bodo churches

II. Implications for Here and Now and Beyond

This dissertation points out a number of implications for Indian churches in general and the Bodo churches in particular. However, at this juncture I am going to confine the discussion of implications only to the Bodo churches. First, as a catachrestic Christian religious education in an integrative model emphasizes the importance of the past histories and present experiences of a community in teaching and learning activity, it would challenge the Christian pedagogues to bring the academic exercise to the learners in their immediate contexts and vice versa. Such an exercise would, in turn challenge Christian pedagogy to develop an ethnographical sensitivity. Learners will more readily be able to relate their faith practices in the lived experiences of the community life.

Building upon this, second, Christian pedagogy can naturally evolve in ways that are methodologically inter-inculturated, dialogical and produced in the language and idioms of a community. This more readily attends to ethnographic resources like that of saori. Hence, it would validate and generate interest in the various cultural elements embedded in a community's life, deriving pedagogical categories from within the community and enhancing the academic repertoire of the community. Further, it would involve learners as performative subjects of their own histories and assist in integrating action and reflection.

Third, my model would encourage pedagogues to reengage in catechesis certain images, signs, symbols and concepts that have been erased, neglected or relegated to the position of inferior "other" during colonizing and missionizing eras. Such reengagement

can occur in catechesis through dialogue and critique and also in ritual embodiment performances within faith practices of a community.

As part of this reengagement, fourth, the catachrestic model would foster the growth of cultural identity with Christian identity. In the formation/constitution of subaltern subjects and agency new maps of meanings and symbolic representation can be created for a community through Christian pedagogy. Thus, it would benefit the Bodo churches to take a fresh look at their curriculum, querying how far they are contextually relevant, effective and emancipatory. In all, Bodo churches need to form a curriculum aimed at dialectically integrating contextual engagement with past histories and present experiences, doing so, within an anticipatory momentum toward liberative transformation and dialogical openness with others.

While I have limited myself to saori, this dissertation encourages further research on other Bodo cultural elements. There are basically two identifiable cultural areas where further exploration might assist Christian pedagogy among the Bodo churches. First, as a part of a catachrestic catechesis seeking a dialectical integration between Christian identity/faith and cultural identity among the Bodo churches, there is an urgent need to carry out in depth research and study on Bodo festivals. Bodos have a number of seasonal and agricultural related festivals, such as *Bwisagw* (New Year or Spring festival), *Magw* or *Domachi* (Harvest festival) and *Amthisuwa* (Festival of renewal/replenishment) to name a few, which Bodo Christians, irrespective of denominations (both Protestants and Roman Catholics) completely disavowed as a result of civilizing and missionizing endeavours. Among the festivals *Bwisagw* stands out as the most important and it is called “father’s heritage” or cultural heritage. As such, the persons who do not observe

Bwisagw are considered popularly as having left their identity and culture. So there should be ways of constructively embracing this festival as Christians. Most of the Bodo festivals are not incompatible with the basic Christian tenets and can be easily accommodated within the broader body of Christian pedagogy and practice with careful theological reinscription and interculturalization.

Second, Bodos are endowed with beautiful dances for all seasons and occasions. Several stand out as prominent: *Kherai* (religious dance with eighteen or more varieties), *Bagrumba* (Spring dance), *Bardwisikhla* (*bar*- wind/breeze, *dwi*-water/rain and *sikhla*-girl), *Dahal Thungri* (War dance), *Dawsri Delai* (Bird dance), *Na Gurnai* (Fishing dance), *Bwisagw Mwshanai* (Festival dance), *Thaokhri Lunai* (Spinning dance) and *Mwsaglangnai* (Freelance dance) etc.⁸⁵¹ Dance not only signifies cultural identity of a community but provides aesthetic embodiments of epistemological categories. Bodos, as agrarian communities, display and express their aesthetic and catechetic life through various forms of dance in close harmony with nature, the animal world and other sentient beings and thus evolved their culture. Any teaching that alienates a community from its cultural aesthetic and catechetic elements becomes aesthetically apathetic. To bring a dialectical integration between Christian identity/faith and cultural identity among the Bodo Christians, it is imperative that these dances be retrieved and made a part of Christian literature and liturgy with sound theological basis.

⁸⁵¹ Along with seasonal and agricultural festivals Bodo Christians have disavowed these dances but for young Christians in 1980s some of them are retrieved among certain Christian groups.

III. Summary Conclusion

In this dissertation I have proposed an integrative catachrestic Christian religious education, employing a postcolonial perspective in a subaltern approach, working with pedagogical dimensions/categories of Bodo saori. My aim has been to envision educating with a vision of integrating gospel and culture, tradition and contemporaneity, and content/text and context/culture. The discussion has sought to bring various ingredients into wholeness in live communities. Such vision aims to build a relationship of learning with others in hospitality, dialogue, humility, and justice for global solidarity.

Catachrestic catechesis seeks for dialectical integration between Christian identity/faith and cultural identity through the retrieval of semantics and semiotics, rites and rituals, and ethos and worldviews of the subalterns. It also works for a dialectical integration between cultural-symbolic (poetics of location) and ethico-political (politics of location) concerns of a community. This promotes among subalterns a way of retrieval and liberation with postcolonial resistance against perpetuation of domination and exclusion. It anticipates emancipation, and works by means of improvisation and hospitality toward dwelling together in hybridic solidarity. This is how, we can engage the larger historical and cultural processes of communities (such as the Bodos) in and through specific cultural practices (like that of saori), attending to their pedagogical dimensions in light of the vision of God's love for all humanity.

The promise of relevancy and effectiveness in what I have advocated lie in the fact that this model is ethnographically sensitive to a particular community yet open for global solidarity. It is theologically synthetic, methodologically intercultural and dialogical, learner centered with palimpsest quality that seeks to cultivate learning

activity by productively harnessing tensions between continuity and change, tradition and contemporaneity, identity and openness, and so on. The task is to live into the vision of God's justice and peace within local perspectives as people joined with others together in global solidarity. This dissertation strives to be one step in such a direction.

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